

thirty-five leagues

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by [thanotaphobia \(blue000jay\)](#)

Summary

“What does it say?” she asks. Techno is the exception in literacy rates. He blinks, letting the quote he’d been studying come into focus.

“Even the finest sword plunged into salt water will eventually rust,” Techno says hoarsely.

(or, the Dread Pirate Technoblade kidnaps a kid and then accidentally makes friends. He's not very good at this.)

we'll rant and we'll roar

“Fuck you,” the kid spits.

There is a bruise blooming over his cheek like a freshly grown flower, petals dancing delicately over his cheekbone and leaving a soft echo of its presence. Technoblade has never been one for roses or lilies or any other flowers— there are few species that grow on the water, which is more his home than any land has ever been.

(Maybe, once, dandelions. Maybe, once, a house on a salt cliff with a tiny garden and a woman whose face he cannot remember, a man whose face is blurry with sea spray and fog. A little sister, maybe. Maybe once.)

Regardless, the boy is bruised. One across his cheek, the other on his forehead creeping above his hairline. A cut on his chin, slashing across the bottom of it. Technoblade's not sure where he may have gotten it; he'd told his crew to be careful. He'll figure it out and dole out punishment accordingly if he has to.

Damaged goods don't fetch trunks of gold, after all.

“Fuck *you*,” the boy continues, his hands bound behind his back as he grins, teeth bloody. Had someone given him a bloody nose and washed away the evidence? Fuck's sake. “I'm going to murder you all. With my bare hands, once I get them out. And I will get them out. I'm gonna scream and shout and you'll— your eardrums with burst, I swear to fucking god, I'm gonna swab this fucking deck with your blood!”

Techno moves to stand, dropping his eyes from the boy's face and turning on his heel. “One of you gag him,” he says, and there's a sharp inhale of surprise from behind him as the kid realizes what he's done, and when the panic sets in fully, more words.

“Please,” he says, begging now. “Please don't— no, please, not— you're not putting me down in the— no, please, don't don't *don't* ! No! My father will have all your heads on *pikes* above the harbor by noon tomorrow! I am—”

“Thomas Innes,” Technoblade says sharply, cutting him off, because he's already tired of the kid's whining and it's not going to stop unless he puts some work into shutting the kid up. God, he'd hear him from the brig, wouldn't he? His boots click against the wooden slats that make up the ship beneath him, as he takes a few steps forward and glances off into the distance.

It's almost sunrise. Behind them, Port Logstead burns. He wonders why on earth they'd build a city like that out of mostly wood— on a good night, with a clear breeze and a new moon, anyone could've set a fire and run.

Shame he had to do it himself, that's all.

“That’s not my name,” the kid breathes out, and Techno holds up a hand to stop one of his crew from stepping forward and gagging the kid. Not yet. Maybe if he scares him right, they won’t have to.

“Your name is Thomas Innes,” he says again, because he’s not *stupid*. “We took you from your bedroom window out of your father’s house, the governor Phil Innes. Or rather, some of my crew did.”

“My name is Tommy,” he spits, and Technoblade raises a brow. He steps forward one more time until he’s level with the kid, then kneels to look at his face. He reaches out— pointer and thumb grasping the kid’s cheek and no matter how much he squirms, he can’t get out of Techno’s grip.

“They said the governor’s kid was a blond, blue-eyed brat,” he tells the kid, watching his eyes widen in fear. “And Tommy is close enough to Thomas anyway. Even if you’re not, some dumb merch will think you are. And if that doesn’t work, then we’ll dump you off the side of the ship when we’re leagues away from any land. Now. Are you Thomas Innes, or do I have to throw you off my ship and let you drown?”

Silence between them. In the distance, Techno can hear people shouting and screaming— waves lap against his own dark ship as they cut through water at a breakneck pace, the sounds of his crew echoing across the waves as they make their escape. The kid’s throat bobs as he swallows, hard.

“Well?” Techno prompts, raising a brow.

“I’m Thomas,” the kid finally rasps. “I am.”

“That’s what I thought,” Technoblade says, and he gives the kid a condescending little pat on the cheek as he moves to stand up once more. He can practically see the thought of biting him cross the kid’s mind, but he makes sure to be quick and sure about his movements as he takes one step back. The kid is on his knees in front of the main mast, hands tied behind his back and attached to the ropes that encircle it, tight enough to keep him there for the moment. Not like there’s many places he could go— the ship is a ship, contained and floating on a midnight sea.

“Captain,” someone says behind him, and he glances behind. Niki Nihachu, in all her five-foot-three glory, stands there and he nods for her to speak. “We’ve got three Navy ships in pursuit, a ways back but still coming.”

“They likely don’t know he’s gone yet,” Technoblade considers. The kidnapping of Thomas Innes had been relatively smooth, all things considered. A bundled up child being rowed out to a darkened ship in the harbor before he could so much as scream for his father, and now that same child is staring daggers up at Techno as he glances back down and then behind them. “Keep us going the direction we are. They won’t think it’s worth it to give chase. They don’t know they’re missing anything other than their money.”

“I told you he’d come,” Thomas says from behind him— or, what was it he said? His name was Tommy. “My father. He will.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” Techno says dryly, glancing down at the furious eyes below him. The kid sneers, then scrunches his nose up and spits, a wad of saliva landing in between Techno’s feet on the deck. He raises a brow, then raises a foot, stepping backwards. “You’ll clean that up tomorrow, then. Niki, find someone to take him below, I’m sick of his face.”

“I’m sick of yours, you bastard!”

Techno ignores him, glancing over to Niki who nods sharply and gives him a salute with a faint smile. He can almost hear her say it– *what are we going to do with him, hmm?* But he doesn’t ruminate on her inaudible question, instead turning and ignoring the kid completely even as he screams and shouts and cusses them all out behind him. The ship moves on– *Apostolis* , *apostle* , his beloved. A messenger, the fastest ship currently on the water.

“I know who you are!” The kid wails from behind him, struggling as another one of Techno’s crew starts to untie him and haul him down, towards the brig. “I know who you are!!! *Dread Pirate Technoblade* , I’ve heard about you and I know who you are and when my father finds you he will rip your head from your body and hang it from the sky so everyone can see! Everyone! Screw you! *Fuck* you! Don’t touch me, don’t–” A scream rips out across the deck, animalistic and shrill, and Techno just braces his hands against the railings and closes his eyes.

The ransom better be worth it. He’s going to have to pay for new eardrums by the end of this ordeal.



Technoblade is right. An hour later, the sails behind them start to get smaller and smaller, and finally they disappear over the horizon altogether. Only then does Techno allow a lantern or two to be lit above-deck, careful eyes keeping watch. He posts multiple men on that duty, a paranoia creeping in as he watches the stars and keeps an eye out behind them. By now they surely will know that the kid is missing, and after that it’s only a matter of time. The sun is rising on a brand new day, and hopefully this day will make them all the more richer. He’d stopped hearing the kid’s screams twenty or so minutes after he’d been dragged below deck, kicking and fighting the whole way. Niki had come up above to tell him that he’d apparently passed out from panic or exhaustion, and Techno can only sigh.

It’s probably for the best, anyways. He knows she feels bad about it based on the way her eyebrows furrow and fall, how she glances out across the wide expanse of blue sea and goes distant for a second. And Techno can’t have that. No pity for the kid who’s going to be making their next sum of cash, and no pity for the kid who promised their heads on pikes. So after a few minutes of thinking about it, Techno assigns himself to prisoner duty.

He, at least, is capable of objectivity.

Niki protests, for all of three minutes. Techno gives her another job, simple and easy: steer the fucking boat, Nihachu, and make course for Las Nevadas.

If he's going to get a price anywhere for the kid, it'll be there. As gaudy and raucous as that town is, and as much as Techno hates it, he knows there's business to be made. Sure, he's got a few feuds there, but it's been long enough he thinks it'll be fine. Quackity surely will have forgotten by now, so there's not much to worry about.

With bright Las Nevadas ahead of them and the burnt-out husk of Port Logstead behind, there are only two things to watch for now. White sails and blue flags behind them, and any escape attempts by their lovely new guest. Techno doesn't think he'll be getting out any time soon—their brig is steadfast and has held many prisoners, especially ones stronger and scarier than some whimpering land rat— but he has to admit, this one is new.

Dread Pirate Technoblade, as the kid had screamed at him earlier, doesn't usually kidnap.

But here he is, with a kid under his heel (literally). Phil Innes is one of the most influential governors this side of the pond, and Techno is willing to bet a lot on the fact he will be itching to have his golden child back safely in his hands.

Safely being the key word, there. Techno's a pirate, yes, but he's not a monster. His crew can attest to that— there's a reason they listen to him. So when it comes time for dinner to be served (it's Ranboo's turn to cook, again, he keeps getting saddled with the responsibility, poor kid, but it's also kind of his fault; his meals are amazing for what little ingredients keep fresh aboard) Techno piles up a bowl with stew and then another, and heads down into the brig.

His boots slosh through water upon arrival— it's past midnight, almost early morning, and there's an inch or so of saltwater in his brig. Normal, of course. He kicks his way through it to the back where the kid had been dragged earlier, and Techno is hardly surprised to see him slumped over against the corner of his tiny cell. It's a shabby thing, nailed together with rattling bars and a simple bolt and chain keeping the kid tied to the ground. His eyes are closed, mouth still stuffed full of cloth— Techno kicks against the bars and watches as he startles awake from whatever slight respite he'd been getting, bright blue eyes duller in the dark squalor of this cage.

“Uck mmof.” The kid says, anger burning bright as he attempts to speak through his gag. Techno holds up a bowl.

“Hungry?” He asks. The kid stares for a brief moment, then scowls and ducks his head.

Technoblade steps into the cell and makes quick work of the ropes around his hands, the gag in his mouth. The kid's hair is stained with dirt and his eyes shine as he glares up at him, but he says nothing at all until Techno has pressed the bowl and spoon into his hands and then stepped back outside the bars himself. Only then does he speak, holding the food close to his chest as the ship creaks and groans around them. Techno can hear the ocean, down here. Her heartbeat.

The brig, as haunting and dark as it is, can be beautiful.

“What do you want with me?” The kid asks, sounding exhausted and terrified and above all—annoyed. There’s still that tone in his voice, that accent, the one that betrays his high status in society.

“I would’ve thought you’d figured it out already,” Techno quips back, leaning against the wall and raising a brow.

“My father, right.” Thomas sneers. “So, what? You’re going to sell me to the highest bidder and hope it’s my dad?”

“Well, no,” Techno says. “I’m just going to sell you to the highest bidder. You’re the one hoping it’s your dad.”

“That’s fucked up,” Thomas tells him. “Like a slaver or some shit.”

“I’m not a slaver,” Techno corrects him, none too gently. “You were just too good an opportunity to pass up.”

“Oh, like that makes it better?” Thomas tilts his head, finally bringing a spoonful of broth up to his mouth and sipping at it. He grimaces, but doesn’t complain. “You’re a wrongun like the rest of them. Doesn’t seem to be helpful, distinguishing one wrongun from the next. You’re all awful. What’s the difference?”

“The difference is— I’m not a slaver,” Techno says. “I’m a pirate. I do the *occasional* bad thing for another few month’s worth of pocket change.”

“Potato, pohtato.” The kid suddenly stands up, the chains clinking against his feet as he shuffles forward, feet slippered and soaked as he throws himself against the bars. Techno doesn’t jump— he doesn’t even flinch as Innes chucks his bowl full of broth back out at him, the metal clanging against the floor and spilling his dinner everywhere. Techno looks down at it, then back up at the kid, and then back down in order to pick it up and slip it under his own bowl, still half-full. “Fuck you! Your food is shit! This is shit! I’m cold and wet an’ miserable— let me *go* , you scummy piece of ass!”

“Where on earth did a governor’s kid learn that type of language?” Techno asks, standing up from where he’d been leaning against the wall. Thomas scowls at him.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” he says. Then he kicks his foot, splashing water through the bars and across Techno’s already-damp boots. “Fuck off.”

“Sure thing.” Techno’s sure this kid is used to always getting his way— it doesn’t measure up of course, to the surprise that lines his face when Techno actually turns to go. His hands fly through the bars but Techno is solidly out of reach.

“Wait,” he says, voice desperate, scared, afraid. “Wait, please, don’t—”

It is far too late to go back on the insults and cruel words. Techno knows what he’s doing is despicable, but his job is done. The kid had eaten a few bites and was alive. He’d let his crew

gather their own meals, and now it's his time to head to bed and for someone else to bear the brunt of the child's language.

He sends down Connor. Retires to his bedroom.

He tries not to think as he settles his hat over his eyes and prays for a dreamless night of sleep.



Techno doesn't see their prisoner for two days straight.

Running a pirate ship is busy work. He has to set their course, keep an eye out for Navy vessels that are surely chasing them by now, and organize a whole crew of people who are running around and doing different jobs. Their crew isn't a small one by any means— Techno is a notorious pirate for many reasons, one of which being his fair pay and reasonable work ethic. He doesn't push his crew beyond their limits, and he gives everyone their fair share.

Sure, he plays favorites sometimes, but to be fair their cabin boy is *everybody's* favorite. Ranboo is mild-mannered for a pirate, young but tall and lanky. He's made Techno laugh more times than anyone else on the ship, and he's a hard worker. Everyone likes Ranboo, so if Techno admitted to Ranboo being his favorite, he doesn't think anyone would complain.

They've got a couple gunners, boatswains and a carpenter. They share the role of cook— everyone takes their turn making meals, although Eryn is usually exempt after an unfortunate incident that left burn marks up the wall.

Taking care of the *Apostolis* is hard work, but there is a glimmer in each of his crewmate's eyes that lets Techno know just how much they love it. Each of them is here for a reason— be it money or fame, or just a call to the open sea.

Techno's is the latter. He spends more time on deck than he should, staring up at the sun and moon and stars, watching the way the horizon rocks with the movement of his ship. He's always preferred the swaying boards of a ship to land, but it's not the case for everyone, it seems.

He emerges the third morning to find the prisoner, Thomas, on deck. Granted, Niki is beside him, and a few other members of the crew scattered around the deck, but he's still above deck. Not in the brig, where Techno had told them to lock him up. He's angry for a moment, storming forward and shoving on his hat in a rush as he stomps towards the two, but something makes him pause.

Thomas is bent over the railing, Niki's hand on his back. As he approaches they both turn, and he can see the green tint to the younger kid's face, and the sympathetic one on Niki's.

“Nihachu,” he says gruffly, but he slows down. The kid turns back to the ocean and a second later, there’s a retching noise.

“He’s sick,” Niki says immediately.

“I can see that,” Techno says. “You could’ve just given him a bucket.”

“She did,” the kid pipes up, and he sounds positively miserable. “It filled up.”

“Disgusting,” Techno says, coming up to the railing and watching the kid grip it like it’s a lifeline. He meets blue eyes, but only for a moment as the kid turns back to the water.

“He should see the sun at least once a day,” Niki says. Techno raises a brow at her. “He’s not going anywhere. He poses no threat. The worst thing he can do is jump overboard and kill himself.”

“Sounds tempting right now,” the kid murmurs, and then coughs wetly. Niki pats him on the back again.

“Jumping overboard isn’t allowed,” Techno tells him sharply, and then gives Niki a look. “He can come up on deck if he’s swabbing it, and that’s it.”

“Better than nothing,” Niki grimaces. The kid laughs, then his breath catches and he reels forward. Techno takes a step back, internally commending Nihachu for her bravery, he’ll have to grab her something shiny at the next port in thanks. He makes his escape then, and hopes that he won’t regret the decision.

He doesn’t, at first. Thomas appears the next day on deck with a bucket and mop in hand, squinting in the sunlight and little red marks around his wrists where he’d been chained to the floor. He swabs the deck as Techno had instructed, starting from the top and moving to the bottom. He’s shitty at it. He misses spots and skips over others, and so Techno takes it upon himself to busy the kid.

“Your hands look like you’ve never done a day of work,” Techno says from where he’s sitting against the railing, watching the kid mop. He knows he’s unnerving him— his shoulders jump and his head snaps over to stare, eyes narrowing.

“I haven’t,” he says. “Not outside school.”

“Shame,” Techno tsks. “We’ll fix that.”

“Fuck you.”

“No thank you. You missed a spot. To the left.” The kid scowls deeper, shifting to cover the spot he’d missed. Techno hums. They fall into silence once more, Thomas sweating in the heat of midday. Normally Techno wouldn’t have anyone working at this time of day except a navigator and someone to keep an eye out on the open ocean around them. But Tommy clearly doesn’t know that, because he’s working anyways and not protesting.

“I hate you,” the kid says. Techno snorts.

“If you didn’t, I’d be concerned,” he says.

“You are literally the worst,” the kid snaps. “A murderer. Awful. I’ve never heard of anyone worse than you.”

“Good people don’t make fun stories,” Techno tells him, lifting one leg to prop it on a box and tug his hat lower over his eyes to block out the sun. “Keep that in mind when listening to tall tales.”

“What, so you’re tryin’ to tell me the stories aren’t true?” the kid asks. He stops swabbing for a moment, leaning on the handle of the mop and peering at Techno. He doesn’t seem angry anymore— just tired and resigned.

“No, they’re true,” Techno says. “Most of them.”

“So you really shot a guy from one hundred and thirty paces?”

“... yes.”

“And you escaped a jail cell by fashioning a lockpick out of bones?”

“Yes.”

“And you lashed together a raft to escape with only strands of human hair?”

“... no.” Techno snorts. “No, not sure where they got that from. I swam.”

“You swam,” the kid says, then huffs. “Huh. I liked the human hair bit better. Is being a pirate always like that? Exciting adventures? Dodging bullets? Kidnapping innocent kids and selling them for ransoms like a little bitch?”

“No,” Techno says with a wry smile. The kid stares at him, and he gestures out towards the mop. “It’s usually more like what you’re doing right now.”

“But this sucks,” the kid says. “Why do it?”

“Keep mopping and maybe you’ll find out,” Techno tells him. The kid scowls, but obediently shoves the mop back into the bucket and swirls it around. Water sloshes across the boards of the deck as he continues to clean, and Techno leans back and kicks both his feet up now, instead of just the one.

Thomas’ cheeks are red and burnt the next time Techno sees him. His skin is angry and shining with the heat, and the kid looks distinctly uncomfortable. He says nothing as he mops, staring down at the boards with a furrowed brow and pained expression on his face. Techno also says nothing. They spend the hour or two together in silence except for the calling of gulls and splashing of water.

The sunburn fades out into freckles. His hands gather calluses, cracked and bleeding from the water and salt in the brig and the hard work of swabbing for hours every day. His hair— which had been pale like the moonlight when he'd first stepped foot on the ship— deepens into a richer, more honey-colored gold. Thomas starts talking more and more, too, which Techno can only see as an inconvenience, and nothing more.

He chats incessantly, about everything and anything. At first, Techno indulges his questions and tall tales, but soon he starts to tire of them. His socialization has a limit, and so he starts to allow others to accompany Thomas on deck. Techno still stays above, keeping an eye out, but Ranboo is much more receptive to the constant barrage of sound that is one Thomas Innes. Their voices mingle together, full of youth and life as they rise up above and tangle with the sails and ropes. Thomas' laughter in particular, sticks with Techno long after he's sent the kid below deck again for the day. It's loud and obnoxious— annoying, really.

One hour turns to two, turns to four. Thomas is given other small duties— run messages here and there, counter the number of powder kegs for inventory. Ranboo teaches him different types of knots, and with Techno observing closely, shows him how to pack a musket barrel with gunpowder. He doesn't get to touch it or shoot it, but he's shown how. He learns about the cannons and Niki is delighted to show him the helm, explaining how the steering wheel works, Thomas' head tipped over the side like he can imagine the huge rudder below them. Connor shows Thomas their stacks of cannonballs, Sneeg explains to him how the sails work and how to tell if the wind is in their favor. Eryn and him get along like a house on fire— literally. Techno has to snatch a flint and steel away from them at one point, scowling the whole time. Eryn should know better.

All the while, Techno is keeping an eye out behind them. They're about a quarter of the way to Las Nevadas, he'd say. Niki agrees, and they plot their course. His mind isn't changed— they're going there whether he likes it or not, because there's money to be made.

One night, Techno lets Thomas stay up on the deck until night falls, and the stars come out. It's just them two on deck, Techno with a candle and a navigation chart, Thomas beside him as he studies the map and fumbles with a compass.

"It's about the angle," Techno is explaining. He's not sure why he's explaining— Niki's better at this than he is, after all. "Between the place you are now and the place you want to go."

"And the stars can tell you that?" Thomas asks, tipping his head up to look.

"Yes," Techno says. "Based on how they meet the horizon. The ocean and the stars work together."

"They're not people, though," Thomas says, turning his gaze to the map once more. "They can't cooperate."

"No," Techno admits. "But they get along just the same. The ocean is a cruel mistress— I'm sure you've heard that one before?" Thomas nods. "Then you know what I mean."

“I guess,” he says, tipping his head. “So we’re going here?” He points, finger landing squarely on the small dot that marks Las Nevadas and its port. Techno nods. He leans forward and takes the compass from Thomas’ hand, showing him the steps they’ll need to take to get there. The kid watches him the whole time, starry-eyed in the glistening night. The moon is almost half-full, and so Techno has to stop for a moment and relight his candle when the wind blows it out.

“I think I get it,” Thomas says, after a second, when the glow is back. “The mopping thing.”

“Hmm?” Techno looks up. Thomas is looking at him, eyes narrowed slightly.

“What you said before,” he says. “How being a pirate isn’t all just guts and glory.”

“I don’t think you do get it,” Techno says, not unkindly. Thomas hasn’t been on a ship long enough to know— he can just tell.

“No, I do,” the kid insists. “It’s boring. It’s not what people say. You’re not what people say you are, either.”

“And for that I’m very glad,” Techno tells him. “People can be cruel.”

“Yeah,” Thomas says. Techno looks over at him, and finds him sitting with his knees to his chest, staring at the maps with unseeing eyes. “I know.”

Techno stares. Thomas doesn’t move for a long moment, and then shifts. He uncurls— his arms first, then his legs, then stands up fully and stretches out. His hair is buffed by the wind, faint but present, and his hair looks paler in the moonlight than it does the sun. All of his harsh angles have been softened by silver cords of light, painting him in their radiance.

“I’ll see myself down,” he says. Techno nods, once.

“Goodnight, Thomas,” he says. The kid pauses for a moment, hesitating by the stairs.

“It’s Tommy,” he says, voice brazen in the night. His face is shadowed now, turned away. Techno blinks once, and then amends his statement.

“Goodnight, Tommy,” he says. The kid nods sharply, then disappears down the steps.

Techno takes a moment to look out over the sea before returning to the maps, shoving any thoughts of their interaction into the recesses of his mind.



Things change after that.

Technoblade won't admit it to himself, but the kid is no longer treated like a prisoner. There is lenience in the way Techno allows him to roam freely, as long as he plays his part in the upkeep of their ship. Thomas— or, Tommy as he's called by everyone now— dances along the lines of their well-oiled machine and slips right into their cogs, finding his place and clanking along in tune. He loses the rich, soft clothing he'd donned before and borrows some from Ranboo instead, a loose white shirt tucked into brown pants, which are subsequently tucked into large brown boots. He's got a belt with a variety of things tucked on it, and Niki always lets him steal her hat. A blue ribbon of Sneeg's ends up tied to his laces, pieces of his crew marking the kid as theirs.

He gets along with everybody. It's ridiculous, frankly. Technoblade should despise him for it, but he can't, because he gets along with Tommy too.

The kid is brash. He knows more cuss words than Techno would expect a boy of his station to know. He's as smart as a whip, often going back and forth with Connor on different debate subjects, but he'll turn around and insult Ranboo with a clumsy mishmash of words a second later that make him sound like an idiot. He plays up his stupidity for amusement, Techno realizes, and he always catches himself before he laughs.

Technoblade is the captain of this ship, and the kid is a prisoner. He has to remind himself of that fact more often than not, now. Not when Tommy's face tans and he tucks up his sleeves to expose his arms to the mid-morning sun, teeth flashing brightly as he laughs with Ranboo over some stupid crass joke. He sings loudly, boldly, and learns the lyrics to shanties in mere moments. It's not unusual to hear him and Eryn calling songs back and forth, their terrible tones rising up and down in pitch as various people get mad and throw stuff at them to get them to stop.

Banter comes easy with him. Techno realizes that halfway into a conversation about tax prices.

"It's ridiculous," he's saying. "People go bankrupt."

"People go bankrupt all the time," Tommy retorts, shrugging and fingers fumbling over a short cord he's practicing a knot on. "Even if it was taxes, the money goes to better places."

"Does it really?" Techno asks, waving his hand between them and making an *ehhh* sound as he does. "Or does it go into people's pockets?"

"Oh, that's the argument everyone uses. Go take a long walk off a short pier," Tommy snaps at him with no real vitriol.

"Tried it once," Techno fires back in turn. "Didn't work as well as you'd think."

"Did you really?" Tommy asks, turning to look up at him.

"Yeah," Techno says. Then, dryly, "The water was cold."

It makes the kid laugh. Techno's smiling in turn before he realizes it.

Tommy eats dinner with them down below deck, now. The brig is no longer his quarters— he sleeps where he can, either smushed up in a hammock together with Ranboo or passed out on tables, catching his rest wherever he likes. Techno doesn't trust him on any kind of watch duty, but he allows the kid to accompany someone else if they're staying up late. Tonight, though, most of them are below deck by the kitchen, if for one very important reason.

Niki has brought out her guitar.

It's rare she does— the instrument is too precious, too valuable for her to risk any damage. But Tommy had found out she had one on board and apparently begged her enough that she'd relented, and took the thing out after they'd all had their dinner. The sun is just barely setting up above them, a haunted sort of aura surrounding them all as Niki strums and tunes it, getting the strings in order. Tommy is entranced from the moment she takes it out to now— chin in both hands, eyes starstruck as he watches her strum and play small little ditties. They range from slow and dirge-like to upbeat shanties, some of which they all know the lyrics to.

Techno doesn't sing. But he does watch, grinning in his seat with his cup in front of him as his crew shifts and jeers, shouting the curse words and singing as best they can in time with Niki's upbeat strums. Tommy seems the most joyful out of all of them— he links arms with Connor and forces the poor man into a dance, swinging them both around with loud laughter and noise. It's bright. He's a shining star, and Techno wonders where the angry kid from only a week or two ago has gone.

"Techno!" Attention grabbed, he sits up a bit straighter. Tommy is grinning at him with a wide smile, holding out a hand. "Sing with us!"

"Oh, no," he says. "I don't, uh—"

"Sing!" Tommy says, then gestures for everyone to chant with him. "Sing! Sing! Sing! C'mon, captain."

"Yeah, come on, *captain*," Sneeg drawls, elbowing him in the side. Techno sighs heavily, slamming his drink down on the table. The ensuing silence is nice— everyone is staring at him, eyes wide, and even Tommy looks hesitant.

And then, slowly, with a flat voice creaking and crackling—

"Farewell and adieu," he sings, a small smile spreading over his face as Tommy crows and cheers, and Niki starts to strum again, "to you Spanish ladies—"

"Farewell and adieu, to you ladies of Spain!" The rest of them join in, thank goodness, because Techno doesn't think he could keep going on his own. He is glad to drop out now while he can, watching as Tommy spins in circles and then plops down beside Niki, grinning and chest heaving. Their chatter rises and falls, the warm candlelight making Techno almost tired, still smiling from before.

He thinks it's going to be a good night, until—

“Captain!” A voice breaks through the sound of the music, and then there’s the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Techno stands, pushing back the seat as he goes and jostling the rest of them, but he catches the first glimpse of Ranboo as he practically throws himself down the last few steps and skids to a halt. His eyes are wide, hair mussed from the wind up above. The room goes quiet, the guitar dying out as Niki’s hands falter and then fall to her lap, clutching the instrument’s wood. Techno’s eyes are on Ranboo now, staring as the kid gasps for air and then points—

“Sails,” he says, pointing back up the stairs. “The blue flag. Southeast of us, and getting closer at a fast clip.”

“The Navy,” someone breathes, and Techno’s not sure who because he’s not listening.

“Battle stations now,” he demands, voice booming throughout the small space below deck and there’s a mad rush of bodies as his crew jumps into action. A well-oiled machine, their ship. “Niki, push her as fast as she can. Can we outrun them?”

“No,” Ranboo admits, shaking his head. “No, I— they’re coming at us from the south, the turn would take us too long.”

Techno makes the decision in a heartbeat. “Then turn us so our starboard faces them head on and get the guns ready.”

“Captain,” Ranboo says, “are you...sure?”

“Positive.” Techno shoves himself up and towards the stairs, and then pauses. In the midst of the commotion and sudden promise of a fight, he’d nearly forgotten. He turns, and thankfully Tommy is still sitting, hands clenched on the table and eyes sharp. “Ranboo?”

“Yeah?”

“Take Tommy below,” he says, and both boys stiffen up but Techno ignores it. “Brig. Lock him in, and *stay with him* .”

“No,” Tommy says, then louder. “No!”

“Was it only one ship?” Techno asks, and Ranboo nods sharply. “Then we’ll be fine. Take him below and lock him in. Stay there, wait for me to send someone to get you.”

“Techno,” Tommy says, Tommy pleads. “Techno, please, no, no no no—”

“Keep your head down and don’t get hit by a cannonball,” is the only advice he bothers to offer both of them before sweeping past and heading up above deck.

Deck is chaotic. People whip back and forth across it, climbing the ropes at mach speeds in order to get the sails in positions and tie what ropes need to be tied. Techno marches through it all and as he does, he feels some amount of spine come back to him. He’s captain. It’s *his*

ship, and he's not going to let some Navy officer with an ego too big for his britches bring him down. He's the Dread Pirate Technoblade, goddammit.

He reaches Niki in only a minute or two. "And?" He asks, glancing out over the horizon. Ranboo had been correct— he sees sails, but it's only one ship.

"It's small," Niki says. "Small and fast. That's the only reason it was able to catch up to us."

"Why'd they only send one?" Technoblade asks, pulling out his spyglass and holding it up to his eye. The banner proclaims the ship as a naval unit, but the ship itself is tiny. Smaller than his own boat. There wouldn't be enough crew to attack them properly, and the vessel is still clipping its way towards them with no sign of stopping. He would be less concerned if the ship saw them and veered away— a scouting ship, perhaps, to get their location before heading off again. They'd dealt with those before. But this one keeps chugging along.

"Keep turning," Techno says, gnawing on his lip and tucking his spyglass away. "We'll have our guns out to them. When I say fire, we fire."

"Yes, captain," Niki murmurs, and the ship continues turning.

By the time their starboard side faces the ship directly, it's considerably closer. Techno can make out individuals on board, and counts them in his mind as he does mental math. His crew surely outnumber them unless they've got more men below, which is unlikely. The Navy liked to do things in grand sweeps, not a scouting vessel gone rogue.

"Hold," he says, when Connor asks if they should fire. "Hold fire, but be ready."

The navy vessel has begun to turn. Starboard to their port, a few guns lining up in tune with theirs. Techno knows *Apostolis* outguns them, and yet they turn anyway. He can make out individual men aboard, hear the shouts of their crew over the din of his own. As the ships get closer and closer together, both sides start to fall silent. Eventually, Techno raises his hand and the rest of the chattering crew falls silent. On the other side, men in naval uniforms line up, guns aimed and cannonballs set.

They don't take the first shot. Techno refuses to give the order until he knows what's going on, so against Niki's hushed and insistent council to do the opposite, he clambers on top of a crate and rests his hand on the hilt of his sword, eyeing the ship across. They're side-to-side now, and close enough that when he raises his voice, it carries.

"Who captains?" he calls out. None of the navy men move. They just sit there and wait. Techno narrows his eyes, and tries again.

"Who is your captain?" he says, a bit louder. "Whoever he is, he's a fool. You are no match for us. We will blow your ship to pieces and set those pieces alight. You have no backup. Turn around now, and maybe I'll spare you." A lie, of course. Techno's okay with breaking the rules of chivalry if it means protecting their location and course. On the other ship's deck, the men are silent. And then, in a rush of clattering boots, someone clambers atop a crate of their own.

Techno watches, eyes narrowing. The man is tall— taller than Techno himself, even, dark boots that reach to his knees, simply brown pants and a white shirt with a blue navy coat haphazardly tossed atop it. It doesn't belong there— it's too small for the man, exposing the white sleeves at his wrists when he stretches his arms out. It's tight around his shoulders. He's got a rifle over one shoulder and both a pistol and rapier on his hip, curly brown hair that gets in his eyes as the wind ruffles it and glasses that glint in the sun.

"I'm the captain," he says. Techno snorts.

"You?" he asks. Below him, Niki creeps out from her spot behind the crate and joins Techno, crouching at his feet as she watches them. Techno can see from his vantage point her pistol in hand, cocked and ready to fire. Her eyes are on the man with glasses. "You look like a university student. Go back home to London, schoolboy."

"Not quite," the man says. While Techno does think he looks like an idiot, he can admit there's familiarity in the way he shoulders a gun. "I'm here to take back what you took from the port."

"And what would that be?" Techno asks. "We took many things."

"We don't care about the gold," the man says. "Or the goods, or any of that. The governor wants his son back."

"They finally noticed?" Techno tilts his head. "Unfortunately, I'm gonna have to say no."

"You will give him back," the man grits out, and he grips the handle of his rapier and pulls it out in one long swooping motion. The metal glints in the sun, and Techno watches evenly.

"You're outmatched," he warns.

"I don't care," the man says, pointing his sword at Techno. It's as if there's a line emerging from the tip of his sword, traveling all the way out and hitting him in the chest, connecting the two of them. They only have eyes on each other, and Techno watches, waiting. He can see the man's eyes now. They're upset. They're desperate.

"All of your men will die," Techno says. The man just tips his chin up and scowls deeply. "Why not wait for backup? The governor's son cannot be so important."

Across the way, the man's eyes narrow, sharp slivers of honey. "You have my *brother* aboard that ship," he says, gesturing once more with his sword. "I don't care about the gold." And oh, isn't that interesting?

"Niki," Technoblade says, not taking his eyes off the man and his pompous shirt that billows in the wind. "How much would people pay for one son?"

"A lot," she says slowly from below him, her hands faltering on her pistol. Techno smiles.

"And how much would they pay for two?" He asks. Across the chasm of water between them, Techno can see the moment the man's eyes widen in surprise and— for a moment— terror.

“Double that,” Niki breathes. Techno raises his arm, his own gun clasped tightly between his fingers.

“I want that stupid kid alive,” he says primly, and then fires.

It’s as though he’s set off a bomb. With the *crack* of his pistol comes the rain of bullets he’d been expecting, and then one after another— the loud resounding *booms* of cannonfire. They’re facing him side to side, like proper ship battles should be fought, but Techno can’t find it in himself to care. He fires on the ship and ducks and weaves—

“Take their helm—” he tells a rogue crewmember, shoving a harpoon into their hand and gesturing towards the other boat. His orders are like holy words, spread from person to person as gospel, and sooner than later his men are boarding their ship, ropes and wooden boards crossing the gap of ocean between their vessels.

Cannon fire, bullets whizzing past his ears and sending shrapnel into his eyes. Techno’s never felt more *alive* .

He tries to keep his gaze on the brown-haired boy as he jumps and stomps his way down to the main deck, but the smoke from their guns makes it hard to see. He loses sight more than once, then twice, and finally he can’t track the boy any more and instead focuses on staying alive. Fire, let the barrel cool a moment, pack the gunpowder down, load a musket ball, fire. Again, and again, and again. It’s mechanical and cool, and Techno knows without a doubt they will win this fight.

He knows as they board the ship, his men storming the Navy’s vessel with unrestrained glee, their roars ripping through the air. He knows it as their cannons tear holes in the side of the ship, unrepairable ones, and he waits as the ship takes on water and starts to lean. He knows they’ve won before the battle is even half over— he fires his weapon and takes out another enemy soldier, and then unsheathes his sword and raises it high.

The glint of sunlight on metal only seems to make his crew hungrier for blood. They are ruthless, just as he taught him— but they are loyal, just as he taught them too. Before long the deck of the navy ship is littered with unmoving bodies, men groaning in pain as they clutch wounds in their sides. His own men stand tall— some are wounded, but Techno surveys the damage and they have lost no one.

No one. His ship stands tall as he slinks across the deck of the fallen, eyes peeled.

“Captain! Here!”

A voice calls out to him and he turns— and there. There’s the boy with the brown hair, his previously starched cotton shirt now stained with grease and blood. No jacket. Sword missing from his belt, hair a mess, he no longer looks cocky and sure of himself. He no longer spits insults across the waves, instead staring down at Techno’s feet with a quiet, blank look as he kneels before him. Techno quietly notes how the boy’s hands are shaking, and moves to wipe the blade of his sword clean with a handkerchief.

“Thank you,” he says to the crew who found him, and they nod sharply. Connor is among them, teeth stained red and eyes glinting. He’s bleeding from his nose, but it doesn’t seem like he cares.

“There’s more prisoners,” he says. “Three or four men unwounded.”

“We’ll make them a deal later on,” Techno promises, then looks down at the brown hair below him and hums. “So. The governor has a second son.”

“*Technically* I’m the first one,” the boy says. “Older, and all.” Techno sighs, and then socks him square in the jaw. Gritting his teeth, the boy spits out a wad of phlegmy blood. It *splats* as it lands on the deck. “Okay. Noted.”

“I find it hard to believe he would send you out,” Techno says. “Especially so underprepared.”

“You got me,” the boy says, raising his hands higher in the air as though he can surrender more than he already has. “I ran off, stole a ship.”

“Wanted to play the hero.” Techno regards the guy below him— he’s got spunk, he thinks. Now that he’s seeing him up closer, he looks older too. Less like a boy and more like a man into his twenties, and despite the ignorant, childish fear in his eyes, he seems somewhat understanding of how he ended up like this.

“Don’t we all?” He asks, tipping his chin up to stare at Techno head-on, and he can only scoff.

“You’re surrounded by the people who will one day be painted as villains,” he reminds him, tilting his blade so it pokes at the man’s chin. “There is no room for heroism aboard my ship.”

“Your ship,” the man says, and he glances just slightly over to the *Apostolis*, eyes glimmering. “I’ve heard lots of stories.”

“None of them kind, I’m sure.”

“Not particularly. She’s a beast.”

“She’s your prison for the next few weeks,” Techno reminds him, and he slips his blade away and resheathes it for now. He glances up, addressing Connor now instead of the kid on his knees. “Take him over, keep him up top. Tie him to a mast or something. And shoot him in the knee if he tries to run.”

“Where the fuck would I run?” The guy asks as Connor hauls him to his— woah, he’s tall— to his feet, hands wrenched behind his back. Beneath them, the navy ship is tilting dangerously. Techno doesn’t think they have long to loot it. “We’re surrounded by ocea— oh, that’s a sharp knife, yes, let’s go.”

He tunes out whatever banter there is in favor of getting a hold of himself. He’s got two of the governor’s sons aboard his boat, a crew of adrenaline junkies, and three or four possible

new recruits. His hands are shaking as he grips the hilt of his sword, surveying the damage to the *Apostolis* from the side while he can, before barking out orders this way and that. Loot what they can, and by the time they've gotten everything off the ship and onto their own, the decks of the navy vessel are hills to climb. Techno orders a fire to be lit— and then, the last of them escape, leaving the dead bodies and navy flag behind to burn as Niki steers them away and out of the danger of fire.

Only then, does Techno take a moment to breathe. Standing up by the wheel, looking down at the waist deck and their brand new prisoner and loot, only then does he inhale and exhale, long and slow. The air smells like soot, acrid and burning.

“We won,” Niki says from beside him, her eyes glimmering with pride.

“We always will,” Techno reassures her. “Technoblade never dies.”

“Keep tempting fate like that and see where it gets you!” she chirps, and Techno chuckles, low and slow. He scans the decks below him as he does, and catches sight— the governor’s second (sorry, *first* —) son, tied to the main mast and glaring daggers up towards him.

“You should go deal with that,” Niki says, not unkindly. “He looks like trouble.”

Technoblade huffs. “I’m not putting it off.”

“Right.”

“I’m not.”

“Go get it over with,” Niki chides, leaning on the wheel and raising a brow at him. “Who knows if he’s even the guy’s kid? He doesn’t look like it.”

Techno stares back at him, meeting his gaze and refusing to tear his eyes away. “There’s only one way to tell,” he says. “Can you go get Ranboo and Tommy from the brig? Make sure Tommy’s hands are tied. Maybe gag him, too. Tell him it’s temporary. A joke.”

“Oh,” Niki says, and then, “ *oh* . Yes. Yes, captain.”

With a short salute (and a subtle nudge, god, Techno’s glad she’s his quartermaster) Niki heads down the stairs and disappears. Techno finally drags his eyes away from their new prisoner in order to make his way down as well.

Most of his men are busy putting their loot away, but Techno doesn’t pay them any mind as he parts through their crowds like the Red Sea. The guy is waiting for him, sitting upright with his legs crossed in front of him. Almost cocky again. Still terrified, if the way he’s trembling is anything to go off of.

“Hello,” Techno says, crouching down to squat in front of him. The man surveys his face, then purses his lips. Techno opens his mouth to start to demand his name— only for the man to spit on him, a huge flying wad of more saliva and blood landing square on his cheek. Techno freezes, then lifts one gloved hand and wipes it away, flicking it from his fingers to the deck.

“Well,” he says, hiding his mounting rage under a glass mirror of serenity. “If you’re telling the truth, you’re a much better shot than your brother.”

“Where is he?” The guy demands, flicking his head in order to get the brown fringe out of his eyes. It’s lanky, slick with sweat and blood and various other fluids. He looks half-mad.

“Where is he?? What have you done to him, you thieving fucking scoundrel.”

“Give it a moment,” Techno says, waving his hand. “You’ll find out sooner than later. Let’s talk about you, for now. Properly. What’s your name?”

“Fuck off, cunt.”

“No sane parent would name their child that.”

“You haven’t met my father, have you?” The man laughs bitterly then, and Techno raises a brow.

“Name,” he insists. “I’m holding your life in my palm.”

“Wilbur Soot,” the man says, and finally, a picture is beginning to emerge. “Disgraced eldest son of the governor of Port Logstead, at your service.”

“Hm.” Techno stays quiet, looking over their new prisoner– Wilbur Soot– with a keen eye. Truth be told, he wasn’t well-versed in the politics of the land. He couldn’t tell you if Phil Innes had one son or six, only that someone had once told him it was an easy climb to the bedroom of one of them, and the man was filthy rich, so he’d pay a handsome ransom. Technoblade considers Wilbur’s face for a moment, and then from behind them, he hears the calls of *captain!* “Guess we’ll find out if you’re lying or not,” he says, dragging his eyes away from Wilbur in order to stand and turn. Ranboo emerges from the ladder below deck, and a second later Niki crawls up. Then, behind her– Tommy, blond, eyes wide but from the looks of it unhurt. He’s gagged and his hands are loosely tied in front of him (Techno is astounded they managed to convince him at all) and he squints as they emerge, blinded for a moment by the sun. Techno can see on his face the way everything registers– the crates of loot on deck, the fiery inferno a ways behind them, the navy flag nowhere in sight. And he sees the moment his eyes find Techno– relief, maybe, or something akin to it.

And then, his gaze drops.

From behind Techno comes a noise like some haunted, wounded animal. He staggers forward in order to avoid a thrashing body, Wilbur Soot screaming at the top of his bloody lungs.

“TOMMY,” he shouts, eyes wild and up on his knees now, pulling against the restraints. Tommy is staring at him like he’s never seen another human person before. Techno watches, and Wilbur screams again, long and loud, shouting Tommy’s name with his voice filled with both relief and upset. “What have you done to him?” he’s shouting as Techno turns to face him again, cheeks red and hair hanging loose. “What have you done, is he okay, let me– let me– Tommy, oh, please, I’ve–” His knuckles are white where Techno can see them, blood dribbling out from under where the ropes fray against his skin. Techno turns and Ranboo is holding Tommy back now, hands fighting against his clothes.

“Let him go,” Techno says, and Ranboo does. Tommy doesn’t hesitate— he bends down, unsheathes a knife from— what the hell, who gave him a knife and why was it in his boot? Regardless, Tommy unsheathes the knife and makes quick work of his bindings, ripping the gag away from his face as he stumbles forward, breaking into a sprint across the deck. He slides to his knees in front of Wilbur (Techno winces internally, holy splinters) and throws his arms around the older boy.

“Tommy,” Wilbur is sobbing, tipping his face into his blond hair. “Tommy, I’m so sorry, I came to save you, I’m so sorry—”

“Wil,” Tommy is mumbling, “Wilbur, Wilbur, Wilbur—”

Techno gives them a minute, and then steps forward.

“I hate to break up your happy reunion,” he says sharply, watching as Tommy’s arms tighten around Wilbur’s shoulders, as they lean into each like the sea meets the horizon, like the roots of a tree clinging to dirt. “But I must. Tommy, is this your brother?”

Tommy pulls back just enough to look Wilbur in the eyes, then looks up to Technoblade. He glances back at Wilbur.

“.... nooooo. No,” he says, unconvincingly.

“That’s a yes,” Ranboo translates from where he’d migrated to just behind Techno.

“Shut the fuck up, bitch-ass,” Tommy shoots back at him. Wilbur has his face buried in his neck now, unable to hold Tommy back like the way the younger one is clinging to him, and Techno heaves a sigh. “I’ve never met this guy before in my life.”

“Remember what you said about two?” Niki comments from behind him. Techno sighs, raising a hand to his cheek and absently scratching at it. There’s a risk— and a cost. A potential payout. “Even if we didn’t want to, well. We’re in too deep.”

“We could throw him over the side hogtied like a pig,” Techno suggests. “That would take care of it.” Tommy shrieks, loud and long.

“Don’t you dare!” He shouts, voice shrill. His fear looks genuine, fingers clutching at Wilbur’s shirt. “Absolutely the fuck not!”

Standing there, surrounded by victory, Techno suddenly realizes he’s lost.

Because.

Because Tommy says *don’t*, and Techno wants to listen.

Shit.

“Captain?” Niki asks, and her voice is strangely quiet in his ears. Techno blinks. In front of him, Wilbur is whispering something into Tommy’s ear, something that makes Tommy’s eyes narrow and his eyebrow do the twitchy thing it does when he lies.

And he notices. Because he's spent enough time around Tommy to *care* enough to notice his tells.

"Take Soot to the brig," he says, and if his voice is strained, no one comments. "Lock Tommy in the navigation office."

"No," Tommy says, halfway through his sentence as he realizes what's going on. "No, no no, no no no no no, no no— let me stay with him, no, no!"

Techno refuses to give in.

"Tommy," Ranboo says, reaching out, "come on."

"Leave us alone!" Tommy shrieks shrilly, voice high and fearful. "Wil? Wilbur! Don't let them take me away, Wilbur!"

"Tommy," Wilbur is saying, then shouting again. "Don't take him, let us be, let us— please, don't take him away— no, please—" He strains, and Techno watches, impassive as Ranboo manhandles Tommy away from Wilbur, Niki having to help at one point, keeping his clawing fingers behind his back as he lashes out and screams, thrashing.

"Tie him up if you have to," Techno says, and Tommy curses at him, spits out the most violent vitriol Techno has heard from him yet. None of it stings. None of it hurts, until:

"I hate you," Tommy tells him, voice wracked with pain and fear and betrayal. "I *hate* you, Technoblade."

Techno turns, and meets his gaze with a stoic mask over his own emotions. Forces it all down, and makes himself view Tommy as he once had: a prize to be won, a chest full of gold. Money, in the end.

"Gag him," he says. "I'm tired of hearing him talk." Tommy screams. Wilbur is deadly silent.

Technoblade waits until the deck is empty of prisoners, and then escapes to his cabin as quickly as he can.

Night falls, and Techno stays inside.

Niki brings him dinner, the warmth of his cabin steaming up the windows from the inside as he wipes it away in order to peer out at the stars.

"It's a cold night out," she says, placing his plate on his desk, full of papers. She finds a clear spot somehow. "Clear skies. Good for navigating."

"We plot to Las Nevadas," Technoblade says, staring out the window and tapping his fingers against the wooden arm of his chair. "The plan hasn't changed."

Niki is quiet for a moment. Then, "Technoblade?"

“Nihachu?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.” Techno turns, raising a brow in her direction. She’s frowning, the expression taking up the entirety of her face.

“Is this the right thing?” She asks after a long, pregnant pause. Techno blinks.

“Of course not,” he says. “I mean, kidnappin’ and murder—”

“No, no, not that,” Niki says. “I’ve made my peace with that. I mean— keeping them apart?”

“It’s logical,” Techno says after a second. He turns back to the window. “Together they would plot something. I don’t think it’s beyond either of them to try and escape. Separate, they can’t plan.”

“Tommy refused to eat,” Niki says, “‘s all.”

“He’s a prisoner,” Techno responds easily. “They often try hunger strikes. I give him no longer than two days.”

“This isn’t funny, Techno,” Niki snaps suddenly, and it’s so— he jolts, he’s surprised. She stares at him, unflinching. “They’re brothers. We beat Wilbur’s ship so surely. He’s hurt— did you even notice?”

“I didn’t particularly care,” Techno says. Niki sighs.

“Shrapnel in his side,” she says. “Wood, probably from one of our cannons. He’s hurt.”

“So *fix* him,” Techno snaps. “Send someone down with a bottle of whiskey and bandages. I shouldn’t have to micromanage every decision you make, Nihachu.” Niki blinks, then frowns deeper, harder. She inhales, long and slow.

“Techno, I’m asking you, not as your quartermaster, but as your friend,” Niki says, her tone polite but stern and full of stinging hurt, “what the *hell* is wrong with you?”

Silence falls between them. Techno’s fingers tap more insistently against his chair.

I’ve made a mistake, he thinks, staring out at the stars. They blink at him accusingly. *I got attached. Objectivity was a joke— I can’t go back on this now, these feelings. Feeling at all is dangerous. I care, Niki. I care too much, and it scares me.*

There’s so much to say. Techno just sighs.

“If Tommy won’t eat then neither will I,” he says, instead of all the declarations of guilt he could be making. “Give my portion away.”

“Techno—”

“I said go, Nihachu.”

Techno doesn't look back at her to know the order's been followed, the loud, echoing slam of his cabin door evidence enough that Niki had stormed out. Techno grits his teeth, quietly inhales and then exhales, pressing the skin of his palm to his forehead and trying to quiet his mind.



The morning sky is blue and orange and pink— crisp and fresh, the smell of saltwater pungent but hey, they're all used to it. Techno loves it, even. It's something free. It's something familiar.

He's been up on the deck to see the sun rise, hat on his head and navigation charts handy. Las Nevadas is not far now. They only have another day or two of sailing before they see its bright lights on the horizon, and Technoblade is definitely looking forward to it.

Tommy has been on his mind all night. Unfortunately so, but he has. Techno can't get the sight of him out of his mind's eye, the moment when he had glanced up at him with terrified eyes and pleaded with him to *please, don't*. It sticks with him even now as he steers *Apostolis* through a mirror-calm sea. The deck is empty, the crow's nest quiet, and Techno absently chews on his cheek as he stares at the sea.

He could've let them stay together, he supposes. There's not much they could do, no matter how clever Tommy is and no matter how smart he thinks Wilbur Soot could be.

Wilbur Soot. A disgraced son of the governor, clearly shoved aside in favor of the second-born. Techno understands why— Tommy is, for a lack of a better word, delightful. And yet, they'd seemed close.

It's not time for everyone to wake up yet, and so Techno steps down from the wheel in order to make his way below. Not too far— just to the door of the navigation office. Sneeg is propped up by the door, feet kicked up on a box, hat over his eyes.

“You better not be asleep,” Techno says. Sneeg snorts.

“Wouldn't dream of it,” he says, tipping his head back so Techno can see the glint of his eyes, alert. “Captain.”

“Go get some rest,” Techno orders. If Sneeg is curious, he doesn't show it, just taking the dismissal as-is and getting up from his post. He tips his hat to Techno and heads down and out towards the deck, and Techno waits until he's sure he's gone before fumbling with the keys on his belt. They clank, and Techno's not surprised when he opens the door to the office and finds Tommy right on the other side of it. There are dark circles under his eyes, his hair flat and hands clenched into fists in front of him, the rope leaving blue marks on his skin.

Before he can even say anything, Techno reaches out and saws them off with his knife. Tommy scowls, but rubs his wrists and doesn't try anything.

"Where's Wilbur?" It's the first question out of his mouth. Something twinges in Techno's gut, something that might be akin to jealousy. It's the same feeling he got whenever he heard Squid's name back when their petty rivalry first started, before it turned into a profitable joke between the two of them.

"In the brig," Techno says smoothly. Tommy moves to storm past him, but Techno throws an arm out and stops him in his tracks. "No, wait."

"I'm going to see him," Tommy says stubbornly, and there's that jealousy again. Techno hates it. He's never looked good in green. "Now."

"No," Techno says slowly. "You're not. Come with me. I'll still shoot you if you don't listen."

"You wouldn't," Tommy snaps back, but his eyes are wary even though it's probably true. Techno wouldn't shoot him.

They head back out onto the deck, Tommy trailing behind Techno as they step out into the sunrise. It's gotten a bit brighter, but it's not properly morning yet. Sneeg is gone, and they are the only two on deck at the moment. Tommy waits, standing by the stairs as Techno brings him all the way up to the highest deck, peering out onto the open ocean. There's something in the distance— an uninhabited island, a tiny piece of land with barely any trees. Tommy leans on the railing and stares out at it, face exhausted even more in the light of the rising sun.

"Do you know why sailors mutiny?" Techno asks. Tommy glances over his shoulder and frowns.

"Because they want to be in control?" he asks. Techno tips his head and nods a bit, settling his hands on the wheel of the ship.

"Something like that," he says. "They mutiny because their captain isn't doing a good job. He's greedy. He's working them too hard, and doesn't feed them enough. Doesn't provide what he should. When sailors mutiny, it's usually for a good cause."

"I'd mutiny you," Tommy says gruffly, and Techno snorts despite himself.

"That's not how you— okay," he says. "Why?"

"You're not providing," Tommy snaps. Techno raises a brow. "Wilbur. I need Wilbur."

"You need him." Techno moves away from the wheel, joining Tommy at the rail. "Why?"

"He's my brother." A snake in his gut, curling, coiled, ready to strike with vicious venom. Techno shoves it down.

“Why did you never mention him before?” he asks. Tommy’s face scrunches up, and he looks away.

“I...” he trails off. “I didn’t think he’d just come after us.”

“You two seem close,” Techno ventures, and Tommy snorts.

“Well, yeah,” he says. “Wil fuckin’— he’s always been there. Even when Dad wasn’t.”

“Mmhm.” Tommy turns to look at him when he hums, eyes narrowing sharply.

“I know what you’re doing,” he accuses. “Right now. I’m not gonna let it happen. Wilbur’s not a wrongun. He’s brave and good and awesome, and you’re not gonna change my mind.”

“I hadn’t even tried yet,” Techno defends, but Tommy charges onward.

“And you’re gonna ask all sorts of questions, but I’m not gonna answer any of ‘em, because you’re a bitch and not letting me see him. And I hate you. I hate you *so much*, Technoblade.”

“Okay,” Techno says. He stares out over the ocean, the tiny island coming closer and closer. They’ll pass it soon, and then it’ll disappear into the distance behind them, a small memory in an ocean of space.

“I’m going to get Ranboo to mutiny,” Tommy says. Techno laughs at that, shaking his head a little bit.

“No, you’re not,” he says. Tommy scowls deeply, and then raises his hand and points at the island.

“We’ll leave you there,” he says. “With nothing but a gun. And one bullet.”

“Pretty standard,” Techno admits. “But Technoblade never dies.”

“Fuck you,” Tommy spits, and his hand drops, and with a start Techno realizes Tommy is crying.

It’s subtle. Just a tear or two trailing down his cheeks, saltwater gathered in the corner of his eyes and reflecting. His face isn’t even scrunched up, just flat, and Techno watches as another fat, round tear drips down his cheek and onto his nose, then falls overboard and surely mixes with the rest of the sea.

“Tommy—” he starts, but the kid just swallows and leans away from him, turning his face to the side.

“Don’t,” he says. “Unless you’re gonna let me see Wil.”

“Wilbur is a prisoner,” Techno says slowly.

“So am I,” Tommy snaps, and he raises a hand to his face to wipe at the dampness there. Techno waits, and he continues: “So am I, and yet I’m up here, and he’s down there. Why?”

Why is that, you fuckin' pirate? What changed?"

I started to care about you, Techno thinks. Out loud, he says nothing. Wets his lips. Watches Tommy search his face for a shred of emotion, but refuses to give it to him. Tommy's face slowly drops, and then he inhales. Exhales. Techno waits.

"You fucked up," Tommy says. Techno blinks, confused— "You fucked up," Tommy continues. "You talked to me. You don't see me as a prisoner anymore, do you?"

"That's not true," Techno says quickly. Too quickly. Tommy's face is unreadable now, a mixture of both horror and delight stretching across it.

"It is," Tommy says. "Oh my god it is, you don't see me like you see Wil anymore, do you? When did it change? You started to like me! You like me!"

"Oh- *kay* ," Techno says. "Back to the navigation room."

"You're not denying it," Tommy says accusingly.

"I do not like you," Techno snaps finally, one of his hands coming to rest on the pommel of his sword for comfort. The words drip from his mouth like acid before he can stop them, that viper in his stomach curling up and out of his throat with all the ferocity it can muster. "You are loud, annoying, and too much of an inept brat for me to even *consider* caring about you. You are a bag of gold. You are a prisoner on this ship, and while *you* may have forgotten that, I haven't. I do not like you. I want you to be compliant so that I can cash in at the end of the day, and sail off with what I've got. I would trade you over to Las Nevadas' ports in a second to keep the rest of this crew safe. Them, I care for. You? Don't make me laugh."

Tommy's face is pale, and Techno almost relishes in the fright that flashes across his features. It makes him feel heady, powerful, back in control—

"You don't know me," Techno finishes, looming over the kid and scowling down at him. "And you and your brother better remember that I am a *pirate* ."

"No," Tommy says, cutting him off in one rushed breath. Techno pauses, raising a brow and tilting his head slightly.

"No?" he asks. Tommy's face scrunches up, disgust plain on his face as he glares up at Techno.

"No," he repeats. "You're a *monster* ." He spits the word like it's something vile, a word worse than any profanity he's ever said before. Techno doesn't flinch, doesn't let it sink into his skin. Brush it off, he reminds himself. He doesn't back down, and neither does Tommy, stuck in a perpetual push-pull as they glare at one another.

"We're going back to the navigation room," Techno tells him slowly. "And in a week and a half, we'll be in Las Nevadas, and you'll never have to see me again." Fear glints in Tommy's eyes as Techno pushes himself forward, but all he does is grab the kid's arm roughly and start to haul him back below deck. Tommy struggles and spits curses at him, but

it does little to get him his freedom. Techno ends up with another gob of actual saliva dripping down his arm, but he ignores it and easily tosses Tommy back into the small cabin, watching him scramble for his balance and turn on his heel when he does.

“I’ll fucking kill you—” he snaps, storming forward, but Techno easily slams the door shut before he can make it out. Carefully he locks it, swinging the deadbolt into place, and ignores the pounding and screaming coming from the inside. He turns to the left—down the hallway, Connor is standing there, watching the whole affair with a flat look. Techno wipes his arm off with a kerchief from his pocket.

“You know what?” Connor says. “I’m not gonna ask.”

“Watch him,” Techno instructs, moving to shove past him as anger boils beneath his skin. “Don’t talk to him, just make sure he doesn’t get out. Talk to him and I’ll toss you over the side myself.”

“Order received,” Connor mumbles, shifting to the side to let Techno pass, shuffling down towards the brig with frankly, murderous intent.

Wilbur Soot is not a glorious man.

Techno had thought, for a moment, he might be. Even with his too-small Navy jacket and his unruly hair, he’d seemed golden aboard his own ship. Standing atop a crate and leading a charge of men in a valiant attempt to get back his stolen brother— it could, conceivably, lend itself to being glorious.

However, after a day or two of sitting in the brig, saltwater up to your ankles and a shitty bandage strapped across your gut, one tends to lose that gloriousness.

Techno pretends like he doesn’t feel vindictively joyous when he finds Wilbur curled up in one of the corners of the brig, hands pulled to his chest and feet splayed out in front of him. He looks pathetic, his wet mop of hair stuck to his forehead, plain pants and stained white shirt making him look more like a pauper than the son of a governor.

Wilbur Soot looks up at Techno, and instead of feeling the greedily happy stab of victory he’s expecting, he wants to wince.

There are bags under the other man’s eyes. He looks aged, although it’s barely been two days.

“What do you want?” Soot snaps, and Techno forces himself to relax. He’s generally not… great, at one on ones, but he doesn’t want Niki here with her comforting, sort of threatening presence, so he just licks his salt-lined lips and stares flatly at Soot in a way that he hopes comes across as impassive.

“Why did your father disown you?” he asks. Right to the point, that’s always been his way.

“Fuck off,” Wilbur spits, and Techno raises a brow.

“Alright,” he says, and because he’s not a monster no matter how many times Tommy says it, he crouches. Wilbur is still in the corner, but Techno can lean right up against the bars of his dank cell and peer in at him. His boots slosh, and the wood creaks under his feet. “How about this— for every question you answer honestly, I let you and Tommy spend a minute together above deck.”

The offer tempts the other man. Techno watches the way his eyes warily peer up at him, plagued by those dark rings, the way they flicker across his face and then lower once more in disbelief. Wilbur lets out a harsh, jolting laugh.

“Right,” he says. “Like I’d take your word.”

“I swear it,” Techno says. He has no reason to lie— as long as they’re above deck and supervised, there’s really no reason to let them see each other. “You want to see your brother? Answer me.”

“My father didn’t disown me,” Wilbur says, his tone slightly mocking as he forces the words out through clenched teeth. “Not yet, anyways.”

“You sound bitter about that,” Techno notes. He’s a little proud of himself— tone is hard sometimes, but Wilbur is so full of anger and resentment right now it’s like staring at a waterfall. Impossible not to get spray in your eyes.

“I don’t want his job,” Wilbur says frankly. “Moseying around with all those posh dickheads? I’d rather die. I made my intent quite clear, and when he still wouldn’t let me go to university the way I wanted to, I just... left.”

“And yet he hasn’t disowned you?” Techno tips his head. Wilbur watches the movement, clearly wary still as his gaze flicks to the gun Techno keeps on his hip.

“I haven’t spoken to him in four years,” Wilbur says smoothly. “I have no idea whether he has or not, truly.”

“And yet you and Tommy keep in touch,” Techno says. Wilbur scowls.

“Our relationship is of no business to you,” he snaps, and Techno has to laugh at that one.

“You’re on my ship,” he points out. “Everything on my ship is my business. One question equals one minute. Why did you keep in touch with him?”

Wilbur swallows, and then heaves a sigh. “He’s my little brother,” he says. “I wasn’t about to just leave him.”

“So you care about him?”

“*Obviously*.” Wilbur scowls, gesturing with one bound hand. “Hello. Look at me. Look at where caring about him got me.”

Techno raises a brow. “Do you regret it?” he asks.

“Fuck no!” Wilbur looks affronted, reeling back. “I’d do it a thousand times over.”

They fall into an uneasy silence, prisoner and captor, staring at each other through the bars. After a moment, Wilbur leans forward slightly, eyes narrowed.

“Where is Tommy?” he asks.

“He’s safe, if that’s what you’re really asking.” Techno leans back, and Wilbur leans forward, until his forehead is nearly pressed against the bars. “If I’m gonna be honest, he acclimated quite well to life on the sea.”

“Tommy’s always been a people-pleaser,” Wilbur says, and there’s some dark undertone to what he’s saying that makes Techno’s hackles rise slightly. “It’s why Dad took such a shine to him after I left, I think. What? Don’t like the implication he was just lying to get under your skin?” Wilbur’s face stretches into a grin, cheshire. “Oh, don’t tell me it *worked* .”

“Shut up,” Techno snaps.

He’s changed his mind. Wilbur Soot is not a pathetic man— he is diabolical, and Techno hates him.

“You know what?” he says. Wilbur watches him, still smiling, but it’s quickly fading as Techno moves to stand up. “Maybe you were right not to trust my word. Pirates, an’ all.”

“Wait.” Wilbur sits up, then staggers to his feet. Techno watches him through narrowed eyes, anger zipping through his stomach like a fly in summer. “Wait, hold on—”

“Faux pas,” Techno says, snapping his fingers. “You had racked up ten minutes with your brother on deck, but I’m thinking about rescinding my offer based on the attitude.”

“You can’t do that,” Wilbur snaps, leaning up against the bars. Techno neatly takes a step back, out of reach. “He’s my brother. He *needs* me.”

“He was getting along just fine without you before,” Techno says smoothly. And then the killing blow: “Does he? Need you?”

Wilbur stares at him, eyes wide and mouth parted slightly like some stupid fish. Techno leans in, and lowers his voice just so.

“Or maybe he’s found someone else worth depending on,” he says, watching Wilbur’s eyes spark up in rage. There’s a fist in his collar and he lets the other man drag him in, banging his forehead against the bars and staring into Wilbur’s face as he chokes on breath, chest heaving with anger. Wilbur grits his teeth and Techno smiles— there is a battle happening here, that much Techno can decipher. A competition is just beginning.

They stand there, stuck in a stalemate, before Techno easily wrenches himself out of Soot’s grasp. “Someone will be down with dinner in about twelve hours,” Techno says, smoothing one hand down his shirt and patting his belt to make sure nothing had been nabbed. “Enjoy the solitude.”

And with that, he turns and heads back up into the morning sun.

all on the salt seas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He doesn't tell Tommy about his and Wilbur's conversation.

It would seem counterintuitive to working himself back into Tommy's good graces. And he is trying to do just that— the guilt lingers, and above that, an air of competitiveness. He'd told Wilbur that Tommy looked up to him— arguing as they are, it's not exactly *true* right now. So he decides he needs to get back on Tommy's good side in order to continue that air of rivalry that had sparked between him and Soot.

Niki tells him he should probably start with an apology, but saying *sorry* is like pulling teeth: painful, not worth it unless you're getting paid, and sometimes it takes an angry woman with a pair of pliers to convince you to do it.

After he's placated Nihachu (see: taken the pliers away) and given her some orders to let off steam (sorry Eryn, some sacrifices must be made) he stands up by the wheel of the ship and thinks. There are only so many ways to apologize. Saying it out loud isn't an option. Actions seem the next best thing, but Techno doesn't think Tommy would want to see him right now. The kid is still locked in the navigation room. He sends Ranboo down to check on him, but the kid just comes back up shaking his head and says it might be wise to give Tommy space.

So Techno does. He doesn't go below deck for the rest of the day, even, choosing to spend it up in the sun and focusing on their travel so he can ignore the lingering guilt that's blossoming in his stomach like moss. Or barnacles— notoriously hard to scrape off.

He gives Tommy space. A whole day of it, just sitting by himself. Techno makes sure they're still on course for Las Nevadas the next morning, eyeing some storm clouds with unease, and then sends Ranboo to bring Tommy up on deck.

The storm clouds in the distance have nothing on Tommy's expression when lays eyes on Techno. Ranboo brings him over to where he's standing and then lingers for a moment, but quickly leaves when Techno gives him the stink eye.

"What do you want?" Tommy spits once they're, for the most part, alone. "I thought you hated me."

"I don't hate gold," Techno corrects, and he notes how Tommy stiffens up, but ignores it. Instead, he turns, staring out over the horizon. "Do you see those?"

"The clouds?" Despite his anger, Tommy is as curious as ever. Techno nods.

"They're storm clouds," he says. "We'll be running through a storm in the next day or so."

Tommy scowls. “And?” he says. “Is that a bad thing?” Curious, even when he's mad at Techno.

Techno turns, raising a brow as he looks at him. “Have you ever been at sea during a storm?” he asks. Tommy shakes his head slowly. “Then I’ll ignore the sheer stupidity of that question. It’s not a bad thing, maybe, but it’s not a good one either.”

“Will we die?” Tommy asks. His tone is strangely upbeat as he asks it, and Techno watches the kid as he stares out across the clouds.

“I’ll do my best not to let that happen,” Techno says. The words feel strange in his mouth, but he says them anyway. Tommy snaps his gaze back over to him and they stand there, a rock against the ocean, Techno’s will eroding slowly away until he finally has to give in and crumble.

“I’m letting you see Wilbur,” he says. Tommy’s eyes brighten immediately, so he’s quick to follow it up with, “Not for very long. And you won’t be left alone. I’ll be there the whole time. Understand?”

“Yeah, sure, whatever,” Tommy breathes, leaning forward on his tiptoes. “Can I see him now? Can we do it now? Before the—” he gestures, “—the storm?”

“That was the plan,” Techno says dryly. He looks over his shoulder and finds Sneeg’s gaze, nodding once, and watching as the man disappears below deck. They stand there in silence for a bit, until finally Sneeg reappears, Wilbur just behind him. Techno can feel the moment Tommy spots him, the kid practically vibrating at his side.

“Wilbur!” he shouts, and Wilbur’s head jerks up. Techno motions for Sneeg to bring Wilbur over, and over they come, Wilbur hobbling as fast as he can to reach Tommy.

Reminiscent of their first reunion, the two slam into each other. Wilbur’s hands are still tied, but he loops them around Tommy’s neck and buries his head into his hair, face disappearing into puffy blond curls. Tommy practically melds himself to Wilbur’s side.

“Thank you,” Techno says to Sneeg.

“No prob,” he says. “Those clouds look...”

“Yeah,” Techno says. “I know. Go keep an eye out.”

“Sure thing.” Sneeg slaps him once on the back and Techno keeps his eyes on Wilbur and Tommy, who are still standing there, stuck together.

“Ten minutes,” he says. “You have ten minutes.”

“You’re a fucking bastard,” Wilbur says, although his voice is muffled. He pulls his head back, spitting out a strand of hair with a grimace. “You liar.”

“What?” Tommy asks, glancing up. “What’d he lie about— Wil, you’re *hurt*, what the fuck.”

“I’m fine,” Wilbur’s quick to reassure. “It’s nothing. Technoblade just–” They lock eyes, and Techno tips his head. Wilbur stares back.

“I gave my word,” he says. “I’m not an honest man, I’ll admit, but sometimes it has to do.”

Wilbur says nothing, just looking down at Tommy. His eyes glint with fondness as Tommy stops fussing over the bandage around his middle, and he shuffles his hands around so he can cup Tommy’s cheek.

“Are you alright?” he asks, voice lower. Techno leans against the railing and looks away, but listens. “Your cheeks look red. You have freckles– since when?”

“Since the sun, I guess,” Tommy says. “You look like shit.” Techno snorts– he can’t help himself, Tommy is just so blunt.

“Thank you, Tommy,” Wilbur drawls. “The brig isn’t the most enjoyable place to be.”

“I know,” Tommy says. He quiets a bit. “It’s dark, innit.”

“Very.” Wilbur hums, and Techno can see them just standing there out of the corner of his eye. “... has he been treating you alright?”

Tommy is quiet. Techno pointedly looks away.

“Yes,” the kid whispers. “I thought pirates were awful, but he’s just... rude. That’s it. I like the rest of them. Ranboo ‘specially, but he’s also stupid and dumb. I think he’s my best friend.”

Oh wow, okay, that didn’t take long. Techno winces. Poor Ranboo.

“They’re pirates, Tommy,” Wilbur says firmly. “Not your friends.”

“They were nice,” Tommy insists. “And Techno, he–”

“Kidnapped you.”

“It’s not like Dad was exactly watching me!” Silence falls, and Wilbur inhales. “Sorry,” Tommy says, sounding meek and small. “I know, I know, it upsets you–”

“No, it’s okay.” When Techno glances over, Wilbur is smoothing a hand through Tommy’s hair. They lock gazes again over his head, brown on brown. The color of their eyes are nearly identical. “You know Dad doesn’t mean it,” Wilbur says gently, but he doesn’t take his eyes off Techno.

“Doesn’t matter,” Tommy says, burying his face in Wilbur’s shoulder. “This sucks. Do you think he’ll ransom us?”

“Of course he will,” Wilbur says, finally breaking eye contact with Techno to look down and smooth a hand over the back of Tommy’s head again. There is no certainty in his eyes– he’s lying. Wilbur has as much a clue about anything as Tommy does.

“Good,” Tommy says stubbornly, muffled. “Tell me— tell me about Sally? How— what were you doing, before?”

“Before we both got kidnapped by *pirates* ?” Wilbur asks, and Tommy giggles, just a little. “Well, let’s see. Sally was falling for me, of course, all according to plan. I was going to ask her on a date any day now. And my classes were going well, especially the music ones—” Wilbur rambles onwards, inane drivel about his civilian life, and Techno sort of tunes out. He looks out over the sea, and then upwards. Niki is sitting on the stairs, staring at him as she tucks her hair back up into a low ponytail. He furrows his brow— she juts her chin out, nodding forward. Techno tilts his head, questioning, and she gestures with her head again, then her elbow as her hands are busy. He turns back, and finds Wilbur looking at him, Tommy still buried in his chest.

“Ten minutes, right?” Wilbur asks. Techno blinks.

Before he can stop himself, the words slip out. “Nah,” he says. “Take as long as you want.”

“What?” Tommy lifts his head and whirls around, still trapped under Wilbur’s arms but facing him now. “You serious?”

“There’s not much else to do,” Techno says. “Would you rather I make you swab the deck again?”

“Fuck no,” Tommy spits. “That sucks. Hurt my hands and shit.”

“Yeah, but you’ve got calluses now. It’ll hurt less,” Techno tells him.

“Show me how to fire your pistol again,” Tommy asks, then looks upward, jostling Wilbur’s chin from the top of his head. “Oh! Oh! Show Wilbur your pistol!”

Techno sighs. Wilbur is looking at him strangely again, but Techno just slips the gun off his hip and holds it out to show them (making sure he’s far enough away it can’t be grabbed, of course).

“Damn,” Wilbur whistles. Then he squints. “Is that a— pig, carved on the handle?”

“No,” Techno says. “It’s a wild boar.”

“S cool as hell,” Tommy says. “Tell him how many people you’ve killed with that gun, Techno!”

“A lot,” Techno says. Wilbur blinks.

“Tommy,” he says sharply. “Those are *our* people.”

“Yeah, but they were attackin’ first, so like...” Techno drags the last word out, lifting one hand to wobble it back and forth. “Y’know?”

“Christ,” Wilbur mutters. “Can we sit? Maybe untie my hands, let us have a deck of cards?”

Techno raises a brow. “You’re some governor's kids, not the Queen of England,” he says. “The floor is right there.”

“Your hospitality is unparalleled,” Wilbur says, layers of passive aggression winding up for a punch. Techno grins, all teeth.

“That’s pirates for you,” he says, *you* coming out more like *ya* . Wilbur just rolls his eyes, and Tommy ducks out from under his arms, grabbing onto one like if he loses physical contact with Wilbur, they’ll both fall apart.

“Can I show him around deck?” Tommy asks. “Please Techno? Please?”

He’s *trying* to get into Tommy’s good graces again. Apologize. That’s why Techno grits his teeth and smiles and says, “Sure.” That’s all. Nothing else. (Worth it for the spark in Wilbur's eye, hah!)

Tommy takes the permission as tactfully as possible, which means he shrieks in loud delight and starts to drag Wilbur off to show him around the deck. Techno follows behind, keeping an eye on them both as Tommy shows Wilbur the ropes, both literally and figuratively. Wilbur is nodding along, even seeming impressed at one point when Tommy shows him how the cannons work. A couple of his crew flit by and Tommy introduces every. Single. One of them to Wilbur, grinning the whole time. He’s having a ball– Techno’s not about to put an end to it.

At least, not until the day has passed, and there’s still things to do. He separates the both of them with a promise that they can see each other again in the morning, and sends Tommy off to get dinner with Ranboo. Wilbur he personally escorts back down to the brig, the dark circles under his eyes slightly abated and dried hair poofy and frizzy from the humidity.

“I never took Tommy for the nautical type,” Wilbur says as he steps back into the cell. “You just let him run around?”

“He wasn’t very threatenin’,” Techno admits. “It was good for morale. If he was moping, it’d be bad for my crew.”

“Sure,” Wilbur says, glancing back as Techno shuts the cell door and triple checks the lock. Down here in the brig, it’s dark and damp, and Wilbur looks more ghostly than he did up in the fresh air and sunlight. He holds himself tall, however, in better spirits than before. “You two seem to have gotten to know each other, though.”

“Well, you know what they say,” Techno says. “*If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.*” Wilbur goes still, and then raises a brow at him.

“Sun Tzu?” he asks. Techno nods once. “*The Art of War*? How do you know that?”

“I... read it,” Techno says slowly.

Wilbur huffs, sounding amused and surprised. “Huh,” he says. “I didn’t think you could read, honestly.”

“Okay, wow, rude,” Techno says, and Wilbur snickers, and then goes still again.

“Do you know how that one ends?” he asks. Techno raises a brow.

“How what ends?”

“The quote.” Techno shakes his head slowly– he doesn’t think he’s following. Wilbur sighs.

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles,” Wilbur says, parroting him. “But then it goes on. *If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.* ”

“I know my enemy,” Techno says assuredly. Wilbur shakes his head slightly, leaning up against the boards of his cell, and purses his lips.

“That’s not the important part,” he says. “It’s about knowing yourself.”

Techno looks at him for a long, long moment. Wilbur is smiling, looking vaguely victorious as he sits in his stupid fucking cell in the brig of Techno’s ship. Techno is the Dread Pirate Technoblade, the smartest man on the seven seas, and yet he thinks, for once, he’s been outwitted.

He turns around and leaves.



“So,” Niki says, shutting the door to Techno’s cabin behind her. Techno looks up– she’s leaning on the closed door, eyeing him. “What’s the plan?”

“What?” Techno asks. It’s late– he’s reading by the very dim light of a candle, one of the few books he has on the ship. Generally it’s in poor taste to keep a library on a ship– flammable, and all– but he keeps a few tucked away in a chest under his bed. Whenever they dock, he trades them out for new ones.

The Art of War is one that he always keeps, though. He scours it tonight.

“The plan,” Niki says.

“For what?” Techno asks, shaking his head slightly. Niki sighs, long and heavy, and then moves. She walks over behind him, snagging a brush from the mirror table as she passes, and settles herself behind Techno. He relaxes at the first touch of soft bristles, and she drags the brush through his hair, tugging it out of the messy braid it’s been kept up in all day.

“Wilbur and Tommy,” she says smoothly, and Techno tenses up again. His fingers stutter over the page he was reading, and he inhales. Then forces himself to relax— shuts his eyes.

“It’s the same,” he says. Forces himself to say, really. “Las Nevadas. Avoid Quackity. Get our bags and trunks of gold. We’re set for months.”

“Really?” Niki asks. She hums as she brushes his hair straight, catching the flyaways.

“Yes,” Techno grits out. “Why?”

“Just wondering,” Niki says lightly. She gathers his hair up in her hands, separating it into three chunks. He can feel her pull it tightly against his scalp, but not enough to hurt. Just a gentle pressure. “Ranboo and Eryn like Tommy, you know. And I’m quite fond of Wilbur. Did you know he plays guitar?”

“I didn’t,” Techno says. Niki hums once more, and he can feel her hands skipping over his hair as she braids, tugging strands this way and that. “How did you find out?”

“I brought him dinner and asked,” she says lightly. Techno tips his head back when she nudges him too, and he can feel a smaller braid start on the left side of his head. “I’d like to hear him play sometime.”

“Niki—” Techno says warningly, but then there’s a blade at the base of his throat and her breath by his ear as she pulls his head back by the unfinished braid.

“Stop lying to yourself,” she says quietly. He swallows, feeling the knife bob against his throat. “The crew can see it. Wilbur and Tommy too. As your friend, Techno, I’m telling you now—” The pressure of the blade increases, just slightly. “Don’t make your crew unhappy.”

“And if I did?” he asks, peering at her from the corner of his eyes. Her hair is a shocking pink, three shades darker than his. They’d dyed it in this very room, together. She is his quartermaster and he trusts her, which is how she’s gotten so close to his neck right now. Her eyes narrow.

“I don’t think you will,” she says. The blade disappears from his neck and he inhales, letting it out shakily as Niki leans forward and presses the tip of her knife to the book in front of him. Techno prays it doesn’t go through the page. “What’s this?”

“Sun Tzu,” he says. “Chinese author.”

“What does it say?” she asks. Right— Techno is the exception in literacy rates. He blinks, letting the quote he’d been studying come into focus.

“ *Even the finest sword plunged into salt water will eventually rust,* ” Techno says hoarsely.

Niki tips her head, hair draping over her shoulder. The candlelight glints in her eyes. “Wise words,” she says. “He must’ve been very smart. Like you. Don’t make stupid mistakes, Techno. I like you too much to see you crack under pressure like this.”

“I don’t crack under pressure,” he insists, turning as she retreats, but she just smiles and rolls her eyes. She tucks one strand of hair behind her ear, and sheathes the knife to her belt.

“Maybe not in a fight,” she says. “I can’t say the same for people.”

“That’s why I have you,” he says, a little pleadingly.

“And I’m here to tell you– don’t make this mistake,” she says. Techno opens his mouth, but she holds up a hand. “Think about it. The storm’s coming, by the way.”

He watches her go, pink hair flashing gold in the light of his flame. He glances down, staring intently at the words scrawled onto paper, and then across the room. His own reflection stares back– a braid lovingly plaited into his hair, intricate and delicate. His hair is pale in the dim light, and his face like the moon, still drained of blood from the sudden shock Niki had given him. He scowls at himself– in it, he sees Tommy, the same expression of displeasure he’d come to cherish.

And there it is.

He likes the kid.

It’s stupid. He’s a prissy rich kid from Port Logstead, with an absent father and a delinquent brother (who is intriguing and witty and infuriatingly fun to compete with). He shines like the sun off the sea, a reflection in calm water, a pale moonlit siren to lure Techno onto the rocks. He’s supposed to be the most frightening pirate on the ocean, and yet he’s been settled by a kid with a heart too big for his chest.

He feels bad about kidnapping him. Guilt.

Fuck.

Techno buries his head into his hands, because he doesn’t know what he’s going to do. He kidnapped the kid– there is a terrible bounty on his head already, and it surely adds to it. He can’t let Tommy and Wilbur stay, can he? No, that would be stupid. They’re not pirates, not cut out to live the life he does. Tommy, killing someone? Tommy, pillaging? Maybe he could see Wilbur doing it, but not the younger one.

He can’t make up his mind. He goes to bed only minutes later, plagued by the thoughts of saltwater and rust and gold.

He doesn’t get much sleep.

The storm hits them halfway through the night. Techno is awoken by being thrown out of his bed as the ship tilts to port side, and then scrambles to his feet and runs out the door without any hesitation.

The rain is coming down in sheets. The wind makes it look like it’s flying sideways– he’s grateful Niki braided his hair, yes, but her hard work is undone in mere moments the second

he steps outside. He's soaked even quicker than his hair goes, and a huge wave crashes over the deck, sending him stumbling.

"Captain!" someone shouts, and he turns to find Eryn clinging onto the wheel. "It came on quick!"

"Turn us into the waves! Keep us at an angle!" Techno shouts back, putting a hand up to his eyes so he can try and keep some of the rain out. He spots Niki with Sneeg and Connor as they lash down various items, their sails already put away in preparation, thank god. "Niki!"

She hurries over, hair hanging in long strands around her cheeks. "Techno," she gasps.

"All hands on deck," he says. "Start lashing things down, keep an eye on the water line. Once you've got people up here, go help Eryn keep up straight!"

"Yes, captain!" she says— more like shouts, just to be heard. She scrambles off without a salute but Techno doesn't fucking care— he's got worse things to worry about.

He has Ranboo start attaching ropes to the main mast to keep them all onboard— especially the ones out on deck right now. At some point, Tommy appears.

"No," Techno says immediately. Tommy glares up at him.

"Yes," he shouts. "I'm helping."

"You can help by not going overboard," Techno shouts back. The wind howls above them, a haunting melody that sings to him, calls to him. "I'm not letting that happen."

"What, like you care?" Tommy sneers. Techno stares at him, deadpan, and then turns. Ranboo hurries over when he gestures, and Techno takes the rope meant for him and grabs Tommy. He ignores the kid's howling in order to lash it around his waist, and then sends him stumbling towards Ranboo, who helps him get his balance.

"I care," he says. Tommy stares at him, eyes wide as he clings onto Ranboo's frame. "Help Ranboo," Techno orders, ignoring the look. "And get back inside if anything goes wrong."

There's a pause, and then: "Yes, captain," Tommy says, and Techno, for a moment, allows his chest to puff up.

Not for long, though. He turns back to his crew and makes sure they're on course, and then makes his way up to the wheel. He notes a couple minutes later that Ranboo and Tommy head back inside, which is good— they only need a skeleton crew above deck. His worry abates for now and he can focus on keeping them in the right position to avoid any damage, but when he sees the trapdoor down to deck swing up again and Ranboo fling himself out, he can tell something's wrong.

He leaves Niki and Eryn on the wheel and meets Ranboo halfway down the stairs.

"Techno," Ranboo gasps. "There's water— below deck."

“How much?” Techno asks, and Ranboo pulls him down. The first layer isn’t bad— it’s the second where it gets worse. Tommy is there in the hall outside the navigation office when they get there, and the water sloshes on their feet.

“Shit,” Techno says. Tommy is pale, and the motion of the ship sends them all sprawling at times. Techno braces on the wall and keeps a hand on Ranboo’s lanky arm. “Get above deck, and huddle under the stairs. Tie yourselves down again. If we’re taking on water, then we need to be ready to go. The brig is probably already—” The word *lost* dies on his tongue.

They all have the same realization at the same time.

“Fuck, Wilbur!” Tommy screams shrilly, and Techno’s first thought is *oh shit*.

He glances at the stairs that lead to the brig, the way water rushes through the boards and how it gathers in pools and crevices. He glances back over his shoulder at Tommy, who is being physically held back by Ranboo by now. They’re all soaked to the bone, hair plastered to his forehead, Tommy’s hand outstretched as he fights frantically to reach out and plead. He sounds terrified over the crashing noise of waves against the hull, and Techno prays to whatever God there is above that the *Apostolis* will survive. Then he prays for his own survival, and turns around to slosh through the knee-high water and down into the brig. He hears Tommy shout something else as he goes and then Ranboo, but he ignores them both in order to fight his way down into the belly of his beast.

It’s pitch-dark down here, blackness dripping from the corners and no light to be seen. Any lamps have been extinguished, and it’s only thanks to Techno’s intimate knowledge of this boat that he can make his way around at all. The water creeps up to his thighs, then his waist, and before long it’s at his hips. Techno ignores the chill, already shivering harshly as he forces himself through the frigid wet in order to make his way down to the brig.

He’s not quite sure why he’s doing this (yes he does, and it's not competition or gold)— he doesn’t have time to ruminate, either, as his hands touch cold metal bars and he kicks out with one foot, finding the bottom rungs of the cell.

“Wilbur!” he calls out, voice hoarse from shouting orders. It’s loud down here— he can only hear the sea, the heartbeat of the ocean, and the ragged sound of his own breathing. “Soot!”

There’s a cough, meager and weak. Techno’s head jerks to the side and he reaches out, hands wandering in the dark before they bump into something cold and firm.

“What the fuck,” Wilbur Soot gasps, and Techno’s eyes are adjusting ever so slightly. He can’t see, but he can guess as to the man’s appearance— just as wet and miserable as he is. They’re both in water up to their stomachs, and Wilbur is clinging to the bars a little further down than Techno had landed, hands cold. Techno fumbles there for a minute, then plunges his own hand into the water and tugs the keys off his belt. He’s shivering so hard he nearly drops them, but manages to keep his grasp as he unlocks the door to the cell. He enters, Wilbur’s teeth chattering audibly as they stand there in the water.

“Hold still,” Techno instructs. Then, he takes a breath and plunges under the water.

The chain connecting Wilbur's feet to the boards isn't hard to find. Eyes shut but still stinging from the salt, Techno slips the key into the lock and feels it give under his hand. He emerges in a splash and gasps for air, reaching for his knife next. He cuts the ropes around his wrists, and then slings one of Wilbur's arms around his shoulders.

"Is the water supposed to be this high?" Wilbur asks. His voice is right in Techno's ear, and he sounds terrified.

"No," Techno says. It's all he offers as he starts to shuffle them out of the brig, nearly slamming into a floating crate at one point. Wilbur stumbles along beside him, both of them working to slosh their way through the cold seawater. Techno pats along the wall in order to find their way to the stairs—feeling them is a relief like no other, and before long the water is lowering, down to their knees, then their shins. They come across a lit lantern, and Techno glances to the side; he catches Wilbur doing the same, and their eyes lock as the ship rocks and cracks underneath them. Wilbur looks like a soaked rat—Techno imagines he looks the same, hair a mess, getting in his mouth and eyes red from the salt.

"You saved me," Wilbur says. Above them, thunder rumbles in the sky.

"Yeah," Techno grunts. He glances up, towards the stairs. Ranboo and Tommy are gone—good. "I think your brother would've killed me himself if I'd let you die."

"Well," Wilbur gasps, and they start stumbling for the exit together, arm in arm. "I think that would've been fair. My ghost would've been very happy."

"I'm sure your ghost would've liked it very much," Techno drawls. Wilbur laughs.

"My ghost would've laughed," he says. "Tommy, beating the shit out of the most well-known pirate to date."

"My ghost would've kicked yours in the shins," Techno says lightly. The seawater must be getting to him, because Wilbur cackles with laughter as they emerge onto the deck.

The storm isn't at full force anymore, but it's still raining hard. It feels like pellets against his skin, and Techno lets his gaze roam around, taking stock of the damage. Wilbur's arm drops from his and he lets go as well, glancing over to watch as the other man staggers over to where Tommy is, under a staircase with Ranboo. He watches as they crash into one another, arms tangled like squid, heads tucked into necks and a wide smile on Tommy's face. It's hard to see through the rain, but Techno thinks Tommy looks at him over Wilbur's shoulder and mouths something.

Whatever. He doesn't have time for it. He turns away, and starts shouting orders in order to make sure his ship doesn't sink.

The ship doesn't sink.

Apostolis survives, as she always does. Techno could kiss her on the mouth, if she wasn't a giant hunk of wood and rope and also kissing is gross. There's significant damage to many parts of her, too much to even consider fixing in one day, so Techno prioritizes and delegates what repairs they can do before they make land in Las Nevadas.

He's still planning on docking. Maybe not for the original purpose, but definitely to restock and get some rest. The storm had taken a lot out of all of them— the crew is snappish and exhausted, but they have to push on.

He doesn't send Wilbur back to the brig, either. Partially because they're still draining out the water. And so as long as the older man helps, he allows him to stay above deck, chattering with Tommy occasionally as they both follow his orders and help restore parts of his beautiful boat to their former glory. Wilbur is a surprisingly skilled worker for never having spent much time on a boat before, and Tommy keeps spirits high. They're both quite invaluable.

Techno thinks, after they stop in Las Nevadas, they might just... continue on.

Maybe.

Halfway through the day after the storm, Wilbur stops him. Hand on his arm, eyes pinning him in place like a butterfly to board. Techno waits, watching as he struggles for a moment for words.

"Why?" he finally asks. "Why did you—"

Techno holds a hand up. He waits a moment for Wilbur's words to die on his lips, and then points. He watches as Wilbur's gaze follows the movement, glancing over to where Tommy is sitting with Ranboo atop a few crates, lashing them down and humming, occasionally trading snippy insults back and forth with the other boy. He's smiling— he's laughing, he's happy.

"That," Techno says, and it's all he has to say. Wilbur's gaze hardens, and he turns back to Techno, eyes searching his face. Techno lets him look. There is nothing he has left to hide.

"What will you do?" Wilbur questions. "When we get to the port?"

Techno sighs. He looks out over the sea, and squints. It's a sunny day, so contrast to the mess they'd been in yesterday, so the water is bright as it reflects the rays. "I don't know," he admits.

Wilbur is quiet. They both are.

"Let me write to my father," he requests. "We'll send it from Las Nevadas. Perhaps it'll give us more time."

"Would you want this?" Techno asks. "This life? It's not— it's not just glory. It's dangerous. It gets people killed."

"I know," Wilbur says. "I wouldn't mind it. But Tommy—"

They both glance over again. Tommy sees them this time, pausing in his work to raise a hand and wave, the sun glinting off his hair. Hesitantly, they both wave back. Techno sighs, long and low.

“He’s stronger than you think,” Wilbur offers, and Techno laughs.

“That isn’t the problem,” he says. Wilbur just shrugs.

“I think we’re very alike, you and I,” he says. Techno raises a brow. Wilbur nods. “Yeah. A bit like brothers, even, I’d reckon—”

“Shut up,” Techno says, swinging his hand out to punch Wilbur squarely in the arm. The other man yelps, dancing backwards with a choked laugh, and Techno fights down a grin. “Go fix the railing.”

“Yes, captain,” Wilbur says, sarcasm dripping through his tone, but at the end of the word his voice lilts up. There’s something genuine there as he turns away, but Techno doesn’t linger on it. Can’t linger on it.

He’s got work to do.



“Do we really have to do this?” Tommy whines. Niki tuts behind him, her hands coated in a dark brown stain as she lathers it through his hair. Techno looks on, arms crossed and leaning against the wall of his cabin.

“Yes,” she says. “When we get to Las Nevadas, we don’t need people jumping on you straight away. This’ll help. It’s not permanent, you know.”

“Still.” Tommy scowls, flicking a stray droplet of dye off his arm. “You’re getting it everywhere.”

“I’m a pirate, not a hairdresser,” Niki snaps back, and Tommy flips her off, only to get the bird in return. His head jerks forward. “Watch it!”

“Ow!”

“If you get dye on my carpet,” Techno drawls, “I’ll throw you both overboard.” He watches Tommy sneer his way and Niki sticks her tongue out, letting the smallest of smiles overtake him.

“Oi.” There’s a knock on the door, and Techno glances up. Wilbur’s face breaks out into a smile, his hand lowering from the doorframe where he knocked. “Shit, Tommy.”

“I look so stupid,” Tommy bemoans, but Wilbur just beams.

“You look like me!” he says jovially, clapping his hands together.

“I wanted to dye it pink,” Tommy says, and Wilbur scoffs, coming further into the cabin. “Techno said it would stand out too much.”

“It would,” Techno says, absently checking his nails. Wilbur is beaming despite it.

“I like the brown,” he says. “It looks nice.”

“It looks like shit,” Tommy says. “Literally.”

“It’ll wash out,” Niki says for the hundredth time. “It’s just a precaution.”

“Oh, speaking of,” Wilbur says. “Las Nevadas. We’re about an hour out, Sneeg said.”

“Amazin’,” Techno drawls. “Just enough time to finish Tommy’s hair. If it were up to me, you wouldn’t even be steppin’ foot off the boat.”

“It *is* up to you,” Niki points out, and Techno just rolls his eyes.

“We’ll stay with you the whole time,” Tommy says, and starts to list off the promises Techno’s already insisted he make. “We won’t go anywhere, we won’t talk a lot, we won’t try anything. We’ll tell you if something is wrong. We’ll go back to the boat if there’s an issue.”

“Good,” Techno says. “Las Nevadas is a pirate town— it’s not like Port Logstead. There are gonna be people lookin’ for you and me, and not the good kind.”

“We can handle it,” Wilbur cuts in.

“It’s not you I’m worried about,” Techno fires back. Tommy scowls at both of them, then ducks his head as Niki forces it down to scrub the back of his skull.

“I worry about all of you,” she says. “Are you sure this is smart, Techno?”

“We have to dock,” he says. “We don’t have a choice. We need repairs, and we need food. As long as we can avoid Quackity, I think it’ll be fine.”

“Quackity used to be the one avoiding you,” Niki says, smiling a bit. “What ever happened?”

“Quackity?” Tommy asks, squirming in his seat. He looks up at Techno from under damp brunet bangs. “Who’s that?”

Techno grunts. “Kingpin of Las Nevadas,” he says. “Owns half the port. Charges taxes. His crew are a bunch of idiots.”

“Brutal idiots,” Niki corrects. “They are dangerous.”

“And stupid,” Techno says, exasperated. “We kind of got into... a fight, last time I was here. Whatever. It was a while ago, I’m sure he’s forgotten. As long as you stay with me, you’ll be fine.”

“We will stay with you,” Wilbur deadpans. “I would rather not wander around a pirate town, anyways.” There is a gleam in his eye that makes Techno think he is lying. Hmm. He narrows his eyes at him, but Tommy is making a loud whining noise before he can question it.

“I look so stupid,” he wails, peering in the flat mirror Niki is holding up for him. “I hate it!”

“You can wash it out when we’re done,” Techno says, slapping a hand onto his shoulder. “Come on. You’ll want to watch as we pull into port.”

“I will?” Tommy says, just as Wilbur asks, “Why?”

“We tend to draw a crowd,” Niki says with a smile, getting up to start washing her hands off. “Go!”

“Thanks, Niki,” Tommy says, glaring angrily at his brown bangs as they fall in front of his eyes. She smiles, and Techno urges them up and back onto the deck.

They can see land in the distance now— an hour out, but Las Nevadas is visible on the horizon. As they creep closer, the buildings get bigger, the masts and sails of other ships docked in their port, white like birds and flags snapping in the breeze high above. Techno orders Sneeg to hoist their own flag and up it goes— proclaiming wide to the world who they are and what they do. Techno keeps watch as Niki keeps them on course, and they start preparing to dock. Tommy and Wilbur hang over the side of the railing after Techno nearly trips over them, ordering them to stay there and watch if they want, but don’t kick up a fuss and don’t get underfoot. They’re good about it for the most part as they slow down, coming up to the docks. Before long, they’ve found a spot and have docked, Connor and a few others jumping down onto the pier to lash their ship there and pay the fee with a bag of gold Techno had given them.

Las Nevadas is as it always is— bustling. People have gathered on the pier to gawk at Techno’s ship, and he ignores their pointed stares and the whispers that come with his presence in order to get things situated. They need food— Sneeg heads out for that, a budget in hand. Repairs are sorted via a carpenter on dock, the same one they’ve used for years, thank you Sam— and by the time Techno has a moment to sit down and relax, Tommy is fucking bursting at the seams.

“Can we go now?” he asks, the second Techno finds a moment of time to lean on the railing and rest. His social battery is not up for this. Tommy looks like an excited puppy, his hair mostly dry by now and puffing up, brown curls with streaks of gold in them. “Can we go see? Is there a market? Can we get drinks?”

“No,” Techno says. Tommy deflates. “No drinks. There’s... a market.” A market filled with hagglers and prostitutes and other nefarious types. Techno’s a pirate, sure, but he’s got standards. He can read.

Oh, speaking of— he needs to trade in his books. Wait, this is perfect.

“Alright,” Techno says. “We can go, but remember—”

“We remember,” Wilbur cuts in. His hand lands on Tommy’s shoulder. “Stay with you.”

“You can stop reminding us,” Tommy says. He looks a bit jittery, but not nervous of Techno, just nervous in general.

“I just want—” *To keep you both safe.* “—to make sure nothing stupid happens. Alright. Come on.” With one short gesture, he motions them towards the gangplank. It’s a thin piece of wood that takes them from ship to dock, and Techno makes sure neither of them fall off of it as they go— sea legs can make a person wobbly on land, he’s found. Techno’s kind of adjusted already, but Tommy is clearly feeling it as he stands on the wood of the pier and scowls around them.

Las Nevadas is bright. There is color everywhere you look— on signs, in the mismatched outfits of its citizens, reds and oranges and bright yellows and greens. Magenta and lime, polka dots and stripes clashing, the whole place reeks of gaudy color and performance. It’s also hot as hell— Techno is already sweating underneath his hat and shirt, the red sash around his waist making him feel restricted, but he’s wearing it anyway. If he’s going to be in Las Nevadas, he has to dress up a little. Even Tommy and Wilbur are wearing some color— helps them blend in. They make their way down the pier, dodging workers and fishermen, Techno sidestepping around a drunk man and subtly sticking his foot out to pitch him right into the water. Tommy gasps, and Wilbur snickers, and they continue onwards.

Niki catches up to them as they walk, her hands in her pockets, bandana tied neatly around her hair. She looks at home in this place of debauchery, and Techno is a little jealous. He always feels so out of place.

“Where are we going?” Tommy asks as they step off the pier and onto cobbled streets. It only gets worse from here, colored banners hanging off of every shop and house in sight. The houses themselves are painted too, and it’s an assault on the eyes. They lean against each other like drunk men, color bleeding into color, roofs tilted at extreme angles and windows covered with sheets and panes of broken glass. The streets stink, as always, and Techno tries not to laugh at the expressions on Tommy and Wilbur’s faces.

“A shop,” Techno says. “I told you.”

“This place is loud,” Wilbur says. He’s smiling, though, and despite his grimace Techno would say the man enjoys the clamor.

“I like it!” Tommy pipes up, but he’s sticking close to Techno as they walk, in a way that makes him think he’s a little more nervous than he’s letting on.

“And to think,” Wilbur says. “You were going to ransom us out here.”

“Just because I’ve changed tactics doesn’t mean I’m above it,” Techno warns. “You two are worth your weight in gold.”

“We’re that valuable?” Wilbur gapes. “Wow, Technoblade, that’s such a compliment.”

“Not what I meant,” Techno grunts. He leads them down a side street, through an alleyway and past a couple market stalls that he has to tug Tommy past— *no, he cannot buy a gun, absolutely not*. They head deeper into Las Nevadas, but not too far. Techno doesn’t like going in so far that he can’t get back to his ship quickly.

“Here,” he says. The storefront is more neutral than any other they’ve passed, a small shop with a creaky wooden sign that reads ‘Oddities’.

“What’s this place?” Tommy asks, and Techno grunts again, nudging the door open with one shoulder.

“A shop,” he says simply. Tommy rolls his eyes, but Wilbur is staring around with interest as they enter. Things are piled high— antiques, parts for guns, random shit that Techno skirts.

“Karl?” he calls out. “Are you back here?”

“Oh!” A voice picks up, bright and clear. “Technoblade!”

“Who’s that?” Tommy whispers, still loudly enough to be heard. A brown mop of hair appears and Techno shuffles them forward, waving them both back behind him. Wilbur picks up a piece of scrap metal and shows it to Tommy— Techno lets them stay behind for a minute as he steps forward, pulling his satchel to the front.

“Karl,” Techno greets.

“It’s been a while since you’ve been in town,” Karl says with a chipper smile. Techno nods. Karl’s gaze shifts over his shoulder, and Techno pointedly ignores it. “Who’s that?”

“People,” Techno grunts out. “Uh. Crew.”

“New faces,” Karl says. He’s smiling, and it’s that ditzy one that he puts on for customers and newbies alike. Below it, though, is something calculating. There are a lot of people like that here. He can hear Wilbur and Tommy behind him, shuffling around and peering into nooks and crannies, so he forces himself to relax. “How nice. Are you here for books?”

“You know me,” Techno says, and Karl disappears under the counter for a second, reappearing with a stack.

They chatter aimlessly as Techno picks through the assortment Karl has, Wilbur and Tommy wandering over for only a moment before exploring a bit further into the shop with Techno’s go-ahead. They disappear into the stacks of junk, and Techno pretends like not being able to see them doesn’t freak him out. Karl is incessant in his chattering away, and Techno is absorbed.

He should be paying more attention. Karl in one ear means he only has one left to listen out for Wilbur and Tommy, and he’s caught up in a moment examining a book, haggling back and forth with the shopkeeper that when their voices die out, he misses it.

He misses it. He should’ve been paying more attention.

Techno can feel something hanging in the air when Karl's voice dies out. It's the silence—tangible, real, in his face. He blinks, glancing up— catches the look on Karl's face. Dread pours over him for a reason he can't explain, and he turns. The door to the shop is closed, and the stacks appear empty.

"Tommy?" Techno calls, turning over his shoulder. "Wilbur?" Silence greets him— not even a giggle or the faint sound of footsteps in the stacks. Then there are footsteps behind him, and the whole world crumples in on itself like a tin can.

"Hey, Technoblade," someone says. Techno stiffens up. When he turns back around, Karl is looking at him with an apologetic look, and he mouths *sorry*. Techno's fingers twitch for his pistol, but Quackity comes into view before he can reach for it, and he's got a gun in his hand, so Techno forces himself to go still.

"Big Q," he says. He notes the gold tooth, the scar across the man's eye, and a vicious spark of joy flits through him despite the mounting panic. "You've healed up well."

"Yeah," Quackity says, spinning the gun on one finger as he comes around. Karl pecks him on the cheek— what the *heck*, Karl— before dipping into the back once more. Q hops up onto the counter and grins, mouth stretching unnaturally with scar tissue. "No thanks to you. My depth perception is fucked."

"Didn't know you knew words that big," Techno drawls, and Quackity drops the smile to scowl, instead.

"Oh, fuck off," he says. "I'm not scared of you."

"Yeah?" Techno asks, and he levels Big Q in a stare. "Really. Is that so?"

Despite his bravado, he notes how Quackity's finger twitches on his gun. Techno thinks he could probably duck behind the stack of metal next to him, but he lightens his gaze before he needs to, and Big Q's shoulders drop once more.

"Yeah," Quackity says. He licks his lips, the cloudy eye on the right side of his face shifting as he stares at Techno. "I was thinking, you know, after the whole *thing* that happened."

"You, thinking? Again, hard to believe," Techno says, and Quackity scowls harder.

"Shut the fuck up!" he says, slipping off the counter with a thud. His shiny boots hit the floor, and he storms forward, only coming up to Techno's chest as he glares up at him. "Shut up. You have no idea what you're talking about, Technoblade. You have no idea!"

"I mean, I have some idea," Techno says. "Is this your poor attempt at *revenge*, Quackity? It could use some spice. Cornerin' me is kind of lame." Where is Tommy, where is Wilbur, *where are they*—

Quackity's eyes narrow. He smiles again, with teeth, and it's less of a grin and more of a grimace.

"Kind of," he admits. "But I'm not done. You know Schlatt?"

Schlatt. Techno does know of Schlatt— never met him, but a corrupt governor is a corrupt governor. He's not sure where this is going, but he decides to play along, at least for now. Maybe Wilbur and Tommy are hiding. "Sure," he says. "I know him."

"He's a great guy," Quackity says. "A really great guy. A business man. After you left town last time, I decided I needed more juice. A partnership. We went halvesies."

"What does this have to do with me?" Techno draws. "Sure, politics, whatever." He flaps a hand in the air between them. "Yawn, borin'."

"Boring, sure." Quackity shrugs. "But he keeps me up to date. And I heard about a little raid on Port Logstead. I heard about a certain kid that got nabbed. A kid who's worth a lot. And then a little while later, that kid's brother goes missing too." The air in the room is suddenly very, very cold. "And then you turn up with two extra people in my port. Funny how things go, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Techno says. "Funny."

Quackity's one good eye gleams. "Consider this my revenge, Technoblade."

Techno finally cracks, and without turning around, shouts, "Tommy!"

Silence answers him. He pulls out his gun before he can stop himself, slamming Quackity back against the counter and relishing the way fear flickers in his eyes. He shoves the barrel against his neck, his chin, and ignores the way Quackity's own gun slams into his gut. "Where are they? What did you do? What did you do?"

"Long gone," Quackity grits out with a grin. "Ooo! I'm so scared! Don't kill me, Technoblade!" It's sarcasm. Techno might have a hard time with tone, but he can at least manage this. "As long as I'm alive, they are," Quackity says. "Should've kept a better eye on that loot."

"You aren't funny," Techno says, and he doesn't let his gun drop. "Where. Are. They."

"Headed to Schlatt," Quackity says. He's grinning, and Techno is fucking fuming. "And now I get to finish the job on you, which is awesome. See? Revenge."

Quackity's trigger finger twitches toward the trigger, and Techno tenses— there's the sound of a shot and both of them wince, but it's not— it didn't come from Quackity's gun.

There's the sound of another shot, pitched low from outside in the street. Then the sound of fighting, and Quackity's gaze shifts to the side, just enough. In the moment of distraction Techno shoves his pistol into his head and knocks him to the side, flinging himself to the left as Quackity pulls the trigger. Both of them fire, their shots going long, and Techno throws himself behind a barrier of metal as Quackity fires again, and then for a third time.

"Come out and face me, Technoblade!" he says over the distant sounds of a street fight. Techno does not want to do that. He fires a couple potshots over the stand he's behind and weighs his options.

He needs to find Tommy and Wilbur before they're shipped off. They're clearly not in the store anymore, and Quackity sounds frustrated now— something hasn't gone to plan, clearly. Techno could try and end it with him, or he could get the hell out of dodge. Pirates aren't always fond of a tactical retreat, but sometimes it's needed. Survival over anger.

He ducks backwards, ignoring Quackity's laughter and annoyed voice, the calls of *coward* egging him on to go and fight. But he thinks of Tommy's golden hair and Wilbur's clever quips, and forces himself to be quiet. Step after step, creeping around the side.

Quackity is looking the other way. Techno raises his gun and fires.

It's the last bullet in the chamber. It pings off a mirror, and Techno sees red blooming on the man's shirt. He waits a moment to watch him fall, and then he's off like a shot, barreling through the door to the back room of the shop. Karl is long gone, of course, and Techno doesn't hesitate to fling himself through the curtain there, and slams right into a small person.

"Shit!" Niki cries, and Techno reels backwards, staring at her.

"Why are you back here?" he asks. She scowls.

"Someone shot some guy on the street," she says. "I wasn't sticking around for— what's going on? Where are—" her eyes narrow.

"Quackity," Techno says. "And some idiot governor. I shot Q, he's inside. They're— heading for the pier, probably, we have to— shit!" In a rare moment of profanity, he lets himself go. "Dammit, Niki!"

"Calm down," she offers, and Techno wants to throw something at the words. He does not want to calm down. "We'll get them back."

"Niki this is *my fault*," Techno laments, panic worming his way into chest as though it's an apple fallen from a tree. "I should have— I shouldn't have let them come with us. What was I *thinkin'*? God, I am so stupid."

"Shut up," Niki says sharply. Her finger lands on his chest, poking him firmly in the sternum. "Shut up. You are not giving up so fast. *We* are not giving up so fast."

"I—" Techno's mouth feels like cotton, and he resists the urge to tear his hair out. "Nick, it's my fault. They already hate me, this'll just seal the deal, can't you see—"

"Can't you see?" Niki asks. "They won't— Tommy adores you, Techno. You haven't even apologized to him and he still loves you. And Wilbur likes you too, you just won't let yourself see it. Open your eyes. You like them and they like you. Admit it."

Techno can't. He can't force his mouth open and admit it like he should.

"Say it," Niki insists. "Come on, Technoblade! You're a pirate!"

"Exactly!" Techno says, the words coming rushed, panicked. "I'm a pirate! Which is why I'm not used to bein' *scared*!"

Niki's eyes glitter. She pokes him harder in the chest. "Why are you scared?" she demands. "Tell me."

"I don't want them to get hurt," Techno says, and it tastes like sunshine and honey butter and dandelions. "I'm scared it's my fault and they'll never forgive me."

"You care," Niki says. Techno blinks at her, and nods, once.

"I care," he says, voice cracking. "How did I end up caring?"

"It's all that damn rust," she says. "You're a fine sword, Techno. You've been in the saltwater too long."

"Shut up," Techno tells her, but there's no bite to it. He shuts his eyes, relishing in the cool darkness behind his eyelids. "Dammit."

"So," Niki says, and he blinks them open to find her right in his face, grinning. "What are we going to do?"

Techno inhales. Exhales. He feels... better, now that he's admitted it. Both to himself and to Niki, who's looking at him like he's the sunset, all squinty and ferocious.

"Go find the crew," he says. "Bring them here. We're getting them back. That's my plunder, fair and square."

"That's the spirit," Niki says, laughing as she turns on her heel and disappears into the crowded streets. Techno grins.

Quackity had been right. Revenge is sweet.



The crew is on board with his plan.

The plan being, of course, murder and pillaging and looting. And getting Tommy and Wilbur back, of course— Techno says that as long as those two come back unharmed, he doesn't care what else his crew does.

"Burn Las Nevadas to the ground," he says, and his crew grins, all of them, ear to ear. Even Ranboo is bouncing on his toes, knife in hand, serious look in his eyes. "Niki is with me. Ranboo as well. Everyone else, I want you to spread out and cause chaos, especially on the pier. Don't let any ship leave."

"Yes, captain!" they call, and with that, people start to disperse. It's almost immediately that Techno hears the sounds of gunfire and screaming and fighting, and he grins. Violence is heady in the air— his crew will be a good distraction, seeing as all they have to do is start the

fight, not finish it. He trusts them to get themselves out of there before anything bad happens. Las Nevadas is a pirate town. There are plenty of men and women with twitchy trigger fingers, after all. Once it's just him, Niki, and Ranboo left in their small side street, he nods.

"Alright," Techno says, unsheathing his sword with a satisfying *shwing*. There's already a plan formulating in his mind, one that will need unparalleled amounts of skill and bloodshed to pull off, but those are nothing if not his specialty. His fingers ache for the handle of a pistol, but his sword will do until he can find more bullets. He turns back to his crew with a glimmering eye. "Ranboo. You're going to be our stealth man. I need you to—"

"Ahem," someone says from behind them all, and in one motion they turn, three swords stuck under the mystery person's chin in a second.

The man blinks. Techno is closest to him— he'd come around the back of the alley somehow, and now he's standing behind them with his hands in the air. One hand is loosely wrapped around a knife, but he looks just about ready to drop it as he swallows, his Adam's apple bobbing against the blades.

"Who are you?" Techno demands. How hadn't he heard him sneaking up?

"Someone who wants to help," the man says. He's got blond hair tucked under a kerchief to keep it off his face, one strand braided. His clothing is somewhat ragged, but his boots are sensible and his chin scruffy. The knife in his hand is well-made. Techno narrows his eyes. "I couldn't help but overhear," the man begins.

Niki scoffs. "I highly doubt that," she says.

"It's true," he says. "Overhearing you— was an accident. But I want to help. You're getting those kids, aren't you? The ones Schlatt took?"

"Why do you want to help?" Techno asks, still with doubts. He's never seen this man before in his life, but his eyes seem honest enough. Thankfully, Techno's been a pirate long enough to never trust someone's eyes. "We're breaking them out, we're not taking them back for ransom. You will not get paid."

"I'm not interested in money," the man is quick to assure. "Schlatt also has something of mine on his ship, that's all. I go in with you, I get what he stole from me, you get what he stole from you. Beneficial to us all."

Techno purses his lips, and then nods. Niki and Ranboo lower their weapons. He keeps his blade sat there neatly on the dip of his throat, as insurance.

"What's your name?" he asks. "Why should we trust you?"

"You shouldn't," the man says smoothly. "Which is why I understand. But you need men, and I can fight. I also happen to know which ship Schlatt came here on."

Techno weighs the pros and cons. Pro: extra fighters. Con: betrayal. The con isn't even that bad, however, because Schlatt already knows they're coming. And this man is only that: one

man. Worst comes to worst, Techno has to kill him himself.

“You will follow my every word,” Techno says. The man nods once, careful of the blade still pointed against him. “Or any word of my crew.” He nods again. Slowly, Techno lowers his blade, and the man does the same with his own knife, sheathing it neatly. He holds his hand out, and Techno warily reaches out to grasp his hand and shake.

“Watson,” the man says.

“Technoblade,” Techno says. The man laughs.

“Oh, I know your name,” he says through the chuckles. “Dread Pirate.”

“Of course,” Techno says, narrowing his eyes a bit. “I should’ve expected.”

“It’s an honor to work with you,” Watson says, and Techno hums. He doesn’t turn his back on him— just shifts a bit so he can see Niki and the others in the corner of his eye.

“Be ready to not hold back,” he says. “This fight isn’t over until Schlatt hangs in the harbor and my bounty is returned to me.”

“You must care very much for the price attached to their heads,” Watson says, and Techno tilts his head slightly, eyes narrowing.

“You could say that,” he retorts. “What has Schlatt taken from you?”

“Everything,” Watson says, and the way his eyes slit down to dark streaks makes Techno think he’s telling the truth. There is rage on his face, and Techno watches as he fights to compose himself and explain. “My entire life.”

“Enough that you won’t hesitate?” Techno asks. The man’s blue eyes narrow.

“Absolutely,” he says. Techno is still on the fence— the man is quick to add: “Plus I know what his ship looks like. Which is probably helpful, yeah, mate?”

“That is helpful,” Ranboo whispers from behind Techno, and he shoots a look over his shoulder at the kid. He and Niki are watching, Niki stepped closer than Ranboo is, hands on the hilts of their knives. Niki raises a brow— Techno shrugs minisculely, as if to say, *hey, might as well give it a shot*. Niki makes a face and then shrugs back at him in agreement.

“You’re in,” Techno says, turning around. Watson looks grim, shoving his knife back into his belt, adjusting it carefully. “This is my quartermaster, Nihachu. You listen to her. And Ranboo, one of my crew. You listen to him, although he’s going to be back up at the moment. You fight?” he asks, and Watson nods once, sharply. “Good. You’ll come with Niki and I, and show us which ship is Schlatt’s.”

It feels like a trap. It should be a trap, and yet when Techno peers deeply into the man’s eyes, he sees nothing but honesty and desperation. The man is clean— he looks well-kept, maybe a soldier? Probably a soldier, based on his stance. Or a former soldier. There’s a look in his eye

that reads danger, and Techno is well-attuned to the feelings in his gut so he trusts it and knows that he can both rely on and keep an eye on this man. He'll be an asset, but Techno will not turn his back on him.

The plan is simple, as they usually are. Complicated plans make for bigger messes, so they end up with something simple: they sneak through the chaos, Watson leads them to Schlatt's ship, they board it and take on the men that have been left behind while the others calm the streets of Las Nevadas. Then they break out Techno's loot, Watson grabs whatever he lost, and they part ways.

Easy enough. It's simple to get through the crowded bar fights that have spilled into the streets, and Techno notes with happiness that none of his men are the ones still fighting. They know how to start something and get out— a good skill. Ranboo disappears behind them, another good skill. Techno leads until they get to the harbor and then Watson takes over, Niki on the rear as they make their way across the boards and saltwater, Techno eyeing each ship with care. There's not too many big ones in the harbor, and so it's not really a surprise when Watson leads them to the biggest currently at port.

"This one," he says. "It's a Navy ship, they just took down the flag."

"How conspicuous," Techno says, tipping his head back to look up at the masts. Big white sails, grand and ridiculously opulent. Fuck, Techno hates the Navy.

"Schlatt's never been one for simple things," Watson says, and Techno notes a tinge of bitterness in his tone before he gestures. "Well? Shall we? How does one normally storm a ship?"

Techno looks at him, ignoring the strange itch in the back of his head. Something about Watson is nagging him, but he can't figure it out just yet. He sets it aside for now and just swallows, nodding once to Niki and then glancing at the gangplank. There's a man beside it, and without any preamble, Techno gives him a shove right into the water. He lands with a shout and a splash, and Techno grins.

"Like this," he says. Watson stares, and Niki laughs, charging her way up the plank as Techno follows.

Storming a ship is simple. Hit whatever comes near you, and don't die. Oh, and be loud. Techno is good at the third rule, as his voice carries quite well even when he's not trying. It's not long before the skeleton crew left on the ship is coming at them with all they got— which isn't a lot. It's not long either before the noise draws out the other occupants of the ship.

The man Techno assumes Schlatt stares down at them from the balcony, hands braced on the railing as they board. His eyes are wide and face pale, especially as Techno fires indiscriminately, nailing a sailor between the eyes with his gun. He's got two sideburns down to his chin, a goatee and a hat that makes him look like a pompous asshole. Techno smiles. The governor looks at him, and Techno looks back, and then he raises his arm to aim his pistol at the man.

“Oh, fuck this,” he can hear Schlatt say as he ducks back, splinters of wood flying above his head as Techno fires and misses. A yelp sounds out across the deck, and then a door slams.

“Coward,” Techno says absently, glancing around as his crew wreaks havoc. Niki is grinning with a spatter of red across her face, and Ranboo is nowhere to be seen, which means he’s doing his job. Watson is absolutely wrecking shit, and Techno just about whistles when the other man takes out a couple soldiers without so much as blinking. Before long the deck of the ship is clear, filled with groaning wounded and dead navy men, and Techno gestures for Watson to follow him. Schlatt is still around, but Techno isn’t worried about him. He’s worried about what’s below, not up above, and so without hesitation they descend.

It’s just Watson and him, at first. A good firefight is adrenaline and kerosene, pumping chemicals up your nose and feeling the very heartbeat of the ship around you. Techno tunes into it and feels it rush in his own veins, feels the gunpowder at his fingertips and the steel on his hip and fights.

Watson is behind him the whole way– the man is efficient and brutal and keeps up with Techno surprisingly well, offering a supportive position behind him. Not at his back, but close enough. They work together like a well-oiled machine, Techno not once having to shout an order out. They just click, and it’s wonderful. By the time they’ve gotten down to where Techno thinks they need to be, they’re both out of breath and Techno’s running out of bullets, blade soaked in blood. Watson is grinning, whooping slightly as they dart down a small wooden hallway.

“Is it always like this?” he asks, and Techno shrugs.

“No,” he admits. “Most of the time it’s boring.”

“Stuff like this is a kick,” Watson says, nearly smashing into a wall as they take a corner. Techno surprises a sailor with a hilt to the temple and sends him sprawling. They both step over the poor kid.

“Sure.” Techno finds the next ladder down, and down they go. “You fight like a military man,” he notes, breathing heavily as they run down the creaking hallways and past various doors. Watson laughs, light and short, keeping up with ease.

“I was one, once upon a time,” he says. “Not anymore. *You* fight like a pirate.”

“I would hope so,” Techno says, and then skids to a stop. There’s a hallway stretching long and beckoning, and they both turn and start heading down that one instead when Watson nods. “I’ve been at it long enough.”

“You’re stuff of legends,” Watson says, the boards of the ship creaking around them as they skid down another small stairway. Techno knows they’re getting down to the bottom of the ship, the belly of the beast, and that’s where the brig is. Niki is behind them, waiting at the top to signal if they need to get out of there sooner. They’d taken on most of the men, however– Techno isn’t worried about anyone following.

“Most of it isn’t true,” Techno tells him breathlessly over his shoulder. He’s reminded of when Tommy had asked him about the stories of his own life, the raft and the escape. Watson’s eyes gleam when he glances back, a hidden mix of uncertainty and curiosity.

“Really?” he asks. “*Most* pirates would claim it was all true.”

“Well, I’m not most pirates,” Techno tells him, stopping in front of a door and glancing it up and down, once. Then he slams into it with his shoulder until the wood cracks.

“No,” Watson says with a laugh, following him through the shattered door. “You’re not. Why are you fighting so hard to get these kids back?”

“Bounty,” Techno grunts. He glances around and then heads off, down towards where he knows the brig will be between all this cargo.

“Sure,” Watson says.

“Is whatever you’re looking for here?” Techno asks, waving an arm. “Go ahead and find it. Take whatever you want while you’re at it.”

“You’re avoiding my question,” Watson says, and Techno stops, turning on his heel to look back at him and narrow his eyes. In the belly, it’s dimmer, and Techno can hear the sounds of shouting above them and water lapping below. His boots are damp. Watson is staring at him with those bright, curious eyes and it nags something in him, but he ignores it for the time being.

“Maybe,” Techno says, “it’s because I don’t want to answer it. My hospitality only extends so far.”

“Do you know how much they’re worth?” Watson asks as Techno turns around. He grimaces.

“Yeah,” he says. “The world.”

The brig is far in the back of the cargo section, the boat bigger than *Apostolis* and making him a little confused. There’s a door where there should be a door, though, and Techno doesn’t hesitate to blast the lock off with his pistol and the ammo he’d gotten from Niki. He assumes Watson is searching the crates for his loot— he can hear footsteps behind him, rustling. The door swings open and Techno steps inside, eyes adjusting to the dim light fairly quickly. There are a set of cages around the room, iron bars towering high to the ceiling, and his eyes catch on the last one. Two shapes, sitting on the floor, and Techno breathes a sigh of relief.

“Brats,” he calls out, and their heads shoot up, a triumphant whoop echoing through the air. Techno adds another bullet to his chamber. “Stand back,” he instructs, and then blasts through the lock on that one, too. The door swings open.

Tommy and Wilbur have twin grins as Techno effectively breaks them out, Tommy taking it upon himself to throw himself bodily out of the cell, right into Techno’s arms. Techno freezes

up, then relaxes slightly, bringing one hand up against the kid's back and feeling him tremble there. They'd been scared. Or at least, Tommy had been.

"It's okay," he says, the words leaving him without permission from his brain. "Uh— you're alright."

"You're shit at being comforting," Tommy sniffs, pulling back from the hug and glaring up at him. "Make me feel better by giving me a knife."

"That, I can do," Techno says, reaching out to hand over a small blade from where it's been hanging on his belt. Tommy cackles, darting to the side to examine it. Behind Tommy, Wilbur comes forward, clasping one hand with Techno's when he holds it out. He smiles faintly, looking relieved beyond belief. It's strange. Usually people look at him with dread— the change is nice. He thinks he likes it.

"Thank you," Wilbur says. Techno grunts. He's about to open his mouth and say something nice, like *it's no problem*, or, *I still plan on trying to ransom you honestly*, or, *I'm glad you're okay*, but before he can, Tommy's shrill voice rises above their heads.

"Dad?!" he shrieks. Techno whips around— only to find yet another sword at his throat.

Tommy is standing to the side, eyes as wide as saucers as Watson holds a sword to Techno's Adam's apple. It presses hard enough to draw blood, and he moves to take a step back, but Watson follows, other arm coming out to gently shift Tommy behind him.

Their eyes are the same color. The hair— under the dye, blond. Tommy's cleft chin matches Phil's, the bridge of his nose is the same as Wilbur's, and—

Shit.

"Dad," Tommy breathes again. "Wait—"

"You took my children," Phil Innes says, raising his voice. It's absorbed by the seawater swelled wood around them, cutting off sharply and sternly. Techno swallows.

"I did," he admits.

"Dad," Wilbur says from behind Techno, and he sees the moment his eyes flick over to him, expression cracking just barely.

"Wilbur," Phil says. Then, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm—" Techno can hear the way his voice cracks. "I'm okay. You can put down the sword."

"No, I can't," Phil says. Techno stares at him, intensity sparking between them as the tension grows thick enough to cut. "I was going to kill you," Phil says, and Techno inhales.

"Likely deserved," he admits, and Tommy makes a small noise of disagreement. Neither of them acknowledge it.

“I knew you would come here,” Phil continues. “I arrived and waited. I’d pay the ransom and then kill you. There are Navy troops in the harbor. I was going to make these streets run *red* .” Techno waits, the governor taking a breath and then, after a moment, he keeps talking. “I followed you,” he says. “I saw you arrive and followed you. I kept my distance, which I regret now, but then I heard you in that alley.”

The alley with Niki, after the confrontation with Quackity. When Techno had admitted to caring. “So,” he drawls. “You joined up with me. What kind of a man does that make you?”

Phil lowers the sword, the tip dragging against the ground. Behind Techno, Wilbur shifts on his feet.

“I joined you,” he admits. “And I could still kill you.”

“Alright,” Techno says. There’s a shuffle of movement behind him, and then Wilbur is stepping forward. Up, in front of Techno, one arm coming out gently to shield him just as Phil is doing for Tommy.

“Let us explain,” Wilbur says, and Phil’s gaze snaps to him, anger flashing like a green sun across his face.

“You are in trouble too, you know,” he says, and Wilbur wilts like a flower on a hot day, a rosebud impaling itself on its own thorn. “You stole a Navy ship, Wil. What the *fuck* .”

“I wanted to help—” Wilbur begins, but before any other words can be said, Phil Innes drops his sword entirely and throws himself forward, Wilbur catching him in his arms as they cling to one another. Tommy is blinking in surprise, and Techno too— he steps back, gives them a moment.

“I thought I’d lost you a second time,” Phil whispers, low enough that it’s clearly just for Wilbur. “They said the ship had been sunk, and I thought— I thought it was permanent this time, Wilbur, I am so *sorry* . For everything.”

Hesitantly, Wilbur brings one arm up around his father’s shoulders. Techno can’t see his face. He doesn’t want to. This isn’t his moment.

“Group hug,” Tommy grumbles, dashing forward to squeeze himself into their space because apparently he doesn’t have a concept of decency like Techno, but neither of the two older men seem to mind. Phil gladly tucks his youngest son under his arm.

“What happened to your hair?” he mumbles, and all three of them laugh, breathless.

Techno watches. The boat rocks beneath them, their lives lit by candles in the darkness of the brig, surrounded by seawater and foam. They’re submerged.

Techno is submerged.

He should leave now. Before they get over their emotions, and Phil Innes realizes that he definitely has to kill Techno, or hand him over to the Navy in port. Techno should leave, find his crew and get the hell out of dodge before Schlatt and Quackity (if he survived) get on his

ass for revenge. He's the Dread Pirate Technoblade, and he steps quietly around the group hug and the fallen sword of the governor, and makes his way towards the stairs.

"Wait," someone says. A voice like the sun. Tommy.

Techno pauses.

He turns, and finds Tommy standing there, fists clenched by his sides. His expression is pained yet righteous, flickers of emotions passing as quickly as the flame wobbles and tilts.

"I'm good, kid," he says, for a lack of anything better to say. "Go home."

"What happened to the guy?" Tommy asks. "The one with the mutton chops who nabbed us? This is his ship, right?"

"Don't worry about him," Phil says, and his voice is dark enough that Techno just shrugs and gestures to him. Tommy glances at his father over his shoulder, and then back at Techno.

"Okay," he says slowly. "So what happened to *me* being worth my weight in gold? You're just gonna leave now?" Tommy asks brashly, and Techno inhales, then exhales.

"That remains true," Techno admits. He clenches his teeth, and thinks of Niki and swords and rust, and says, "You're worth it. All of it. But I'd prefer you over the gold."

"Then why aren't you taking me?" Tommy asks. He's scowling, but there's hurt layered underneath it. "If I'm worth it?"

"Go home," Techno repeats, pointedly not looking at Phil or Wilbur. There is a mess there that he is not qualified to handle, a family that has been torn apart and reunited. Phil is still watching him with wary eyes, he knows, but the older man makes no moves to stop him. Tommy looks like he's on the verge of tears.

"I want to come with you," Tommy says, and Techno's heart shatters.

"No," he says, gentle but firm. "A pirate's life isn't the one for you, kid. You're born for bigger things." *You shine too bright*, he doesn't say. You're the sun on the waves, blinding anyone who looks out over you. You're a sword, still glittering in the light of the blacksmith's shop.

"No, I'm not," Tommy insists, stepping forward, reaching out. Techno steps back. There's whispering behind Tommy, voices that Techno can't register right now. "Take me with you—"

"Tommy." Techno stands there, and his voice cracks when he says, "I'm sorry."

"No," Tommy says. "No, you don't get to apologize now, not when— no!"

"I am," Techno says, "so sorry."

"Don't you fucking leave me, Technoblade," Tommy demands, and he sounds like he should, some stuck-up rich kid who Techno had planned to sell off for ransom. He demands, and

Techno laughs, because he wants to listen. Tommy reaches out for him and Techno just shakes his head. “Fuck you! Fuck you!”

“Go *home* .” Techno says one last time, avoiding Tommy’s grasping fingers with a sidestep, and then turns and flees up the stairs, out of the brig, back onto shore.

Wilbur catches up with him on the pier. Niki is ahead of them, the *Apostolis* already prepared to leave. They’ll have to get repairs somewhere else, Techno thinks wryly to himself.

“Wait,” Wilbur says, a hand caught in his sleeve, fingers tangled and hair wild. His eyes are shimmering. “Tommy can’t come with you. But I can. I want to. My father and I— we spoke. Let me come with you.”

Techno looks at him, hard and long.

“My ship doesn’t have a place for idiots,” he tells Wilbur, watching the other man’s face fall, just slightly. He finishes, “You better get on board quick, so the ones chasing us can’t catch up.”

Wilbur’s face splits into a grin, all teeth. He rears backwards, bringing a hand up to his forehead in a lazy salute as they both continue forward, Techno peering up at the grand masts of his ship, thinking of the voyages ahead of them. “Yes, captain,” Wilbur says grandly as he hops onto the gangplank, Techno quick to follow. He can see the Navy flags now and knows they’ll have to run fast, like the wind, a messenger on the harbor and sharp steel on the wide, open ocean.

They make it. No one will *ever* catch them.



And, if Port Logstead is never attacked by pirates again, rumors of a small, ghostly ship with a fierce crew defending its waters, well.

The governor doesn’t have *any* remarks.

Chapter End Notes

WOOOOOOOOO THIS GOT SO LONG BUT ITS OUT FINALLY GOD I HATE IT
LMAO pirates man amiright???? this has been sitting here for AGES and huge thank
you to grey greyquills who pushed me to finish it..... LMAO..

what was your favorite bit? let me know in the comments!

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